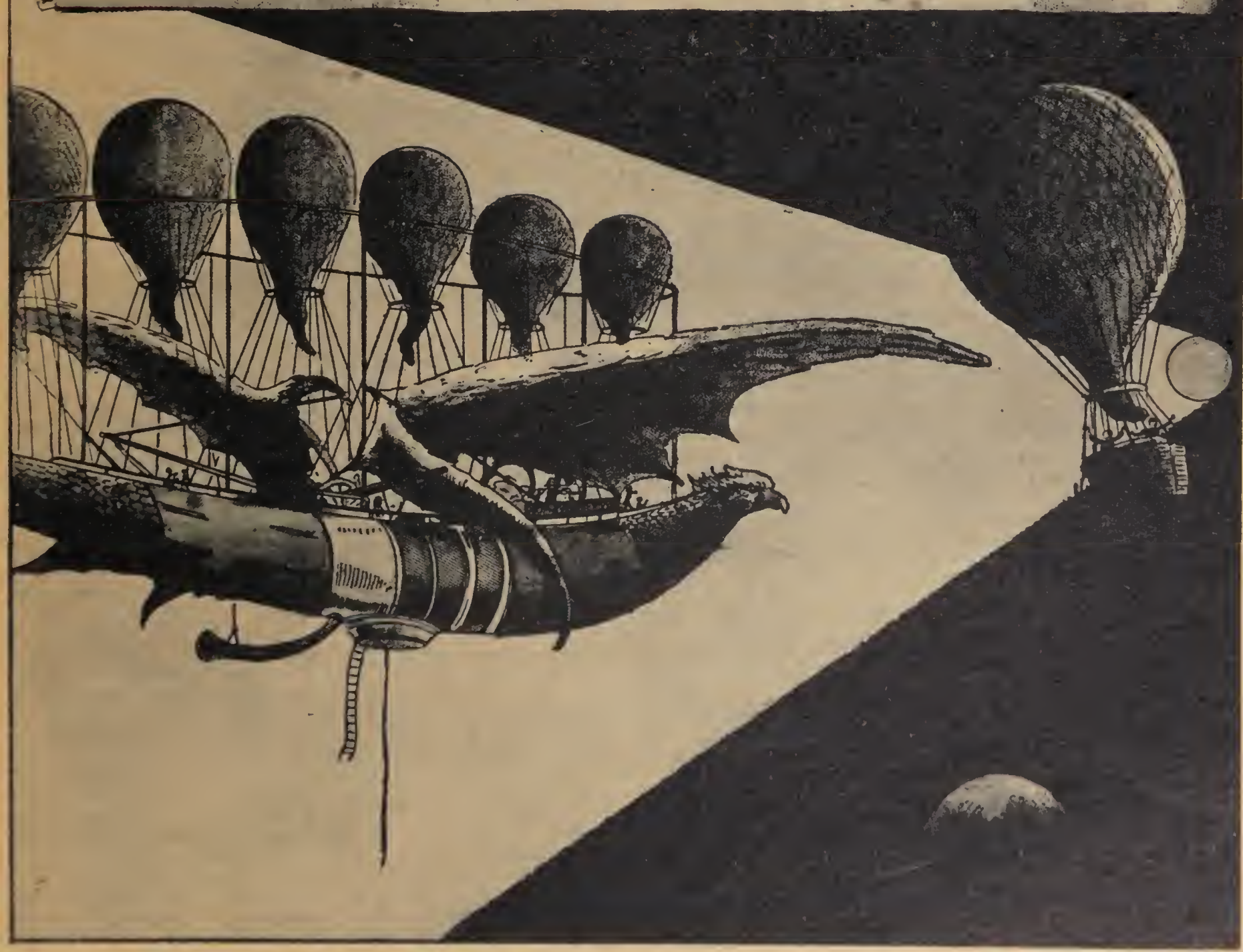
PLUCK AND LUCK
COMPLETE STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, November 7, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

No. 174 NEW YORK, OCTOBER 2, 1901. Price 5 Cents.

TWO BOYS' TRIP TO AN UNKNOWN PLANET.

By RICHARD R. MONTGOMERY.



Darkness everywhere, save in one place, far ahead, where the sun's rays seemed to penetrate in one gigantic beam which shone directly upon the mysterious air-ship, bringing out every detail with startling effect. Filled with awe, the boys gazed upon it.

These Books Tell You Everything!

A COMPLETE SET IS A REGULAR ENCYCLOPEDIA!

Each book consists of sixty-four pages, printed on good paper, in clear type and neatly bound in an attractive, illustrated cover. Most of the books are also profusely illustrated, and all of the subjects treated upon are explained in such a simple manner that any child can thoroughly understand them. Look over the list as classified and see if you want to know anything about the subjects mentioned.

THESE BOOKS ARE FOR SALE BY ALL NEWSDEALERS OR WILL BE SENT BY MAIL TO ANY ADDRESS FROM THIS OFFICE ON RECEIPT OF PRICE, TEN CENTS EACH, OR ANY THREE BOOKS FOR TWENTY-FIVE CENTS. POSTAGE STAMPS TAKEN THE SAME AS MONEY. Address FRANK TOUSEY, Publisher, 24 Union Square, N. Y.

SPORTING.

No. 21. HOW TO HUNT AND FISH.—The most complete hunting and fishing guide ever published. It contains full instructions about guns, hunting dogs, traps, trapping and fishing, together with descriptions of game and fish.

No. 26. HOW TO ROW, SAIL AND BUILD A BOAT.—Fully illustrated. Every boy should know how to row and sail a boat. Full instructions are given in this little book, together with instructions on swimming and riding, companion sports to boating.

No. 47. HOW TO BREAK, RIDE, AND DRIVE A HORSE.—A complete treatise on the horse. Describing the most useful horses for business, the best horses for the road; also valuable recipes for diseases peculiar to the horse.

No. 48. HOW TO BUILD AND SAIL CANOES.—A handy book for boys, containing full directions for constructing canoes and the most popular manner of sailing them. Fully illustrated. By C. Stansfield Hicks.

FORTUNE TELLING.

No. 1. NAPOLEON'S ORACULUM AND DREAM BOOK.—Containing the great oracle of human destiny; also the true meaning of almost any kind of dreams, together with charms, ceremonies, and curious games of cards. A complete book.

No. 23. HOW TO EXPLAIN DREAMS.—Everybody dreams, from the little child to the aged man and woman. This little book gives the explanation to all kinds of dreams, together with lucky and unlucky days, and "Napoleon's Oraculum," the book of fate.

No. 28. HOW TO TELL FORTUNES.—Everyone is desirous of knowing what his future life will bring forth, whether happiness or misery, wealth or poverty. You can tell by a glance at this little book. Buy one and be convinced. Tell your own fortune. Tell the fortune of your friends.

No. 76. HOW TO TELL FORTUNES BY THE HAND.—Containing rules for telling fortunes by the aid of the lines of the hand, or the secret of palmistry. Also the secret of telling future events by aid of moles, marks, scars, etc. Illustrated. By A. Anderson.

ATHLETIC.

No. 6. HOW TO BECOME AN ATHLETE.—Giving full instruction for the use of dumb bells, Indian clubs, parallel bars, horizontal bars and various other methods of developing a good, healthy muscle; containing over sixty illustrations. Every boy can become strong and healthy by following the instructions contained in this little book.

No. 10. HOW TO BOX.—The art of self-defense made easy. Containing over thirty illustrations of guards, blows, and the different positions of a good boxer. Every boy should obtain one of these useful and instructive books, as it will teach you how to box without an instructor.

No. 25. HOW TO BECOME A GYMNAST.—Containing full instructions for all kinds of gymnastic sports and athletic exercises. Embracing thirty-five illustrations. By Professor W. Macdonald. A handy and useful book.

No. 34. HOW TO FENCE.—Containing full instruction for fencing and the use of the broadsword; also instruction in archery. Described with twenty-one practical illustrations, giving the best positions in fencing. A complete book.

No. 61. HOW TO BECOME A BOWLER.—A complete manual of bowling. Containing full instructions for playing all the standard American and German games; together with rules and systems of sporting in use by the principal bowling clubs in the United States. By Bartholomew Batterson.

TRICKS WITH CARDS.

No. 51. HOW TO DO TRICKS WITH CARDS.—Containing explanations of the general principles of sleight-of-hand applicable to card tricks; of card tricks with ordinary cards, and not requiring sleight-of-hand; of tricks involving sleight-of-hand, or the use of specially prepared cards. By Professor Haffner. With illustrations.

No. 72. HOW TO DO SIXTY TRICKS WITH CARDS.—Embracing all of the latest and most deceptive card tricks, with illustrations. By A. Anderson.

No. 77. HOW TO DO FORTY TRICKS WITH CARDS.—Containing deceptive Card Tricks as performed by leading conjurers and magicians. Arranged for home amusement. Fully illustrated.

MAGIC.

No. 2. HOW TO DO TRICKS.—The great book of magic and card tricks, containing full instruction of all the leading card tricks of the day, also the most popular magical illusions as performed by our leading magicians; every boy should obtain a copy of this book, as it will both amuse and instruct.

No. 22. HOW TO DO SECOND SIGHT.—Heller's second sight explained by his former assistant, Fred Hunt, Jr. Explaining how the secret dialogues were carried on between the magician and the boy on the stage; also giving all the codes and signals. The only authentic explanation of second sight.

No. 43. HOW TO BECOME A MAGICIAN.—Containing the grandest assortment of magical illusions ever placed before the public. Also tricks with cards, incantations, etc.

No. 68. HOW TO DO CHEMICAL TRICKS.—Containing over one hundred highly amusing and instructive tricks with chemicals. By A. Anderson. Handsomely illustrated.

No. 69. HOW TO DO SLEIGHT OF HAND.—Containing over fifty of the latest and best tricks used by magicians. Also containing the secret of second sight. Fully illustrated. By A. Anderson.

No. 70. HOW TO MAKE MAGIC TOYS.—Containing full directions for making Magic Toys and devices of many kinds. By A. Anderson. Fully illustrated.

No. 73. HOW TO DO TRICKS WITH NUMBERS.—Showing many curious tricks with figures and the magic of numbers. By A. Anderson. Fully illustrated.

No. 75. HOW TO BECOME A CONJURER.—Containing tricks with Dominoes, Dice, Cups and Balls, Hats, etc. Embracing thirty-six illustrations. By A. Anderson.

No. 78. HOW TO DO THE BLACK ART.—Containing a complete description of the mysteries of Magic and Sleight of Hand, together with many wonderful experiments. By A Anderson. Illustrated.

MECHANICAL.

No. 29. HOW TO BECOME AN INVENTOR.—Every boy should know how inventions originated. This book explains them all, giving examples in electricity, hydraulics, magnetism, optics, pneumatics, mechanics, etc., etc. The most instructive book published.

No. 56. HOW TO BECOME AN ENGINEER.—Containing full instructions how to proceed in order to become a locomotive engineer; also directions for building a model locomotive; together with a full description of everything an engineer should know.

No. 57. HOW TO MAKE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS.—Full directions how to make a Banjo, Violin, Zither, Aeolian Harp, Xylophone and other musical instruments; together with a brief description of nearly every musical instrument used in ancient or modern times. Profusely illustrated. By Algernon S. Fitzgerald, for twenty years bandmaster of the Royal Bengal Marines.

No. 59. HOW TO MAKE A MAGIC LANTERN.—Containing a description of the lantern, together with its history and invention. Also full directions for its use and for painting slides. Handsomely illustrated, by John Allen.

No. 71. HOW TO DO MECHANICAL TRICKS.—Containing complete instructions for performing over sixty Mechanical Tricks. By A. Anderson. Fully illustrated.

LETTER WRITING.

No. 11. HOW TO WRITE LOVE-LETTERS.—A most complete little book, containing full directions for writing love-letters, and when to use them; also giving specimen letters for both young and old.

No. 12. HOW TO WRITE LETTERS TO LADIES.—Giving complete instructions for writing letters to ladies on all subjects; also letters of introduction, notes and requests.

No. 24. HOW TO WRITE LETTERS TO GENTLEMEN.—Containing full directions for writing to gentlemen on all subjects; also giving sample letters for instruction.

No. 53. HOW TO WRITE LETTERS.—A wonderful little book, telling you how to write to your sweetheart, your father, mother, sister, brother, employer; and, in fact, everybody and anybody you wish to write to. Every young man and every young lady in the land should have this book.

No. 74. HOW TO WRITE LETTERS CORRECTLY.—Containing full instructions for writing letters on almost any subject; also rules for punctuation and composition; together with specimen letters.

(Continued on page 3 of cover.)

PLUCK AND LUCK.

Complete Stories of Adventure.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, November 7, 1898. Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1901, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Tousey, 24 Union Square, New York.

No. 174. NEW YORK, OCTOBER 2, 1901. Price 5 Cents.

CHAPTER I.

UP IN A BALLOON.

"G'long, there! G'long, girl!" cried Fred Sawyer, giving his horse a cut which sent the ramshackle old buggy bowling along the dusty Ohio turnpike. "G'long! That's the talk. This old mare is going to turn out a second Dexter, I do believe. Hold on to your hat, Bert, unless you want to get it blown away."

"S-s-a-y, F-f-r-e-d," chattered Bert Monroe, the other occupant of the buggy, "don't go so fast, there's a good fellow. It's as much as I can do to hold on to the seat."

"But we'll never catch that balloon trip if we don't make some speed. Bert—hi, there, girl! Mind what you're about!"

"If we get our necks broken on the road we'll be up in a balloon with a vengeance," grumbled Bert. "We can't get to Russelville before seven o'clock, anyhow."

Ben Monroe was mistaken, however, for the buggy turned into the yard of the Tippecanoe Hotel at precisely half-past six.

"Can you direct us to Professor Hudson's house?" asked Fred of the stable boy, who came running out of the hotel to meet them.

"I can," replied the boy.

"Where is it?" asked Fred.

"It's deown that street clost to the Fair Grounds," answered the boy; "but you won't find the professor there. He's inside the grounds fixin' his balloon."

"I guess we had better leave the buggy here and proceed on foot," said Fred.

"All right; come on, then," said Bert.

The boys leaped from the buggy and hurried in the direction indicated, but as they neared the inclosure, behind which the immense bulk of a balloon could be seen bobbing, Bert showed some disposition to hold back.

Bert had, up to this moment, possessed all the enthusiasm Fred had in the matter. But now, when he realized the dangerous mission they were on, he felt his courage giving way.

"Say, Fred," he remarked, at length, "it's a terrible risky thing."

"Nonsense, Bert! There's no danger. Why, Professor Hudson is one of the most experienced aeronauts in America. He's been up more than a hundred times."

"So I heard."

"Well, do you suppose he would undertake such a thing if he didn't know what he was about?"

"Suppose some accident should happen?"

"I don't imagine such a thing will take place."

"I think we had better give it up."

"Won't do it. Suppose we make the trip safely? Won't we be the lions of Vancetown Academy, say?"

"I don't dispute that, but——"

"There's no but about it as far as I'm concerned, Bert. Now, look here, Professor Hudson advertises in the Russelville Clarion that he's going to make a balloon ascent tomorrow, and that he is willing to take up two passengers with him. You and I agreed between ourselves to be those two passengers if we get the chance. We've skipped from the academy without saying a word to any one. For my part, I'm going if the professor will take me. If you're scared already, why, you'd better back out."

"Shan't do it," replied Bert, stung by this reflection upon his courage. "If you go, I will. But here we are at the gate of the fair grounds. We'll soon see whether we are too late or not."

Secretly, Bert had begun to hope that they might be too late, but in this he was doomed to disappointment.

Such a thing as going up in a balloon is not relished by everybody, and therefore very frequently it is a rather difficult matter for an aeronaut to find a companion for his flight, as had proved to be the case with Professor Hudson up to this point, as we shall see.

Upon entering the fair grounds, they found the aeronaut alone working over his balloon, and in reply to Fred's eager question he informed them that theirs was the first application he had received.

"So you think you would like to go up with me, young gentlemen?" he asked.

"That's what we came for," replied Fred enthusiastically. "I'm just dying for the chance to go up in a balloon."

"It will be a strange experience for you."

"That's just what we want."

"There's some risk."

"We'll take the risk."

"How old are you?"

"I am nineteen. My friend is eighteen."

"I suppose your parents are willing?"

"Why, for that matter," began Fred, "my parents live in Chicago and Bert's in Iowa. There would hardly be time——"

Right here between these questions came an interruption which cut short Fred's explanation.

Fortunately for his purpose, the question did not come up again.

"Say, mister, who's a-runnin' this here airship?" drawled a voice behind them.

Unobserved by either party, an intruder had entered the fair grounds, a long, lank, sleepy-looking individual, wearing a coat much too short for him, and trousers which must have been too long, for, notwithstanding the fact that there was not an ounce of mud anywhere, they were tucked inside his boots.

"I wonder what we have got here?" exclaimed Bert.

"Give it up," replied Fred.

The professor eyed the newcomer a few seconds, and then answered:

"I am the proprietor of the balloon. What do you wish?" answered the professor, surveying the questioner with no very favorable eye.

"Advertised for passengers, didn't ye?"

"Yes."

"Waal, I want to go."

"I can't take you. My car is already fully engaged."

"Sho! you don't say so. Now, that's too bad. I jest sotted on goin'. Always thought I'd like to take a trip to the moon."

"I'm not going to the moon this trip," replied the professor drily.

"Say, mister, who's a-runnin' this here airship?" drawled a voice behind them.

Unobserved by either party, an intruder had entered the fair grounds, a long, lank, sleepy-looking individual, wearing a coat much too short for him, and trousers which must have been too long, for, notwithstanding the fact that there was not an ounce of mud anywhere they were tucked inside his boots.

"I wonder what we have got here?" exclaimed Bert.

"Give it up," replied Fred.

The professor eyed the newcomer a few seconds, and then answered:

"I am the proprietor of the balloon. What do you wish?" answered the professor, surveying the questioner with no very favorable eye.

"Advertised for passengers, didn't ye?"

"Yes."

"Waal, I want to go."

"I can't take you. My car is already fully engaged."

"So! you don't say so. Now, that's too bad. I jest sotted on goin'. Always thought I'd like to take a trip to the moon."

"I'm not going to the moon this trip," replied the professor dryly.

"Waal, neow, yer don't s'pose I thought you wuz, do yer? I'm only jokin', of course. Looker here, my name's Lish Sniffin. I'm from Sweezey, State of Varmount. I'm peddlin patent bee-hives out in these parts, and seein' your notice in the Clarion I thought I'd jist drop around an ax ye to take me along."

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Sniffin, but it will be quite impossible for me to accommodate you," replied the professor, while the boys found that they had all they could do to control their laughter.

"Perhaps on the next trip——"

"Want to go this trip. Give you ten dollars to take me," interrupted the man.

"I can't do it, sir. These young gentlemen are to be my passengers."

"Can't you make room fer one more?"

"No, sir."

"I'll make it twenty dollars."

"Nonsense!"

"Say, I'll throw in one of my patent bee-hives. Best thing out. Warranted to produce more honey to the square inch than any other bee hive on the market."

"No, no! Don't bother me any more," replied the aeronaut irascibly. "Young gentlemen, consider the matter settled. Be here at four o'clock to-morrow. It will not be necessary for you to make any other preparations than to provide yourselves with your thickest clothing. I shall have everything on board that will be needed for the trip."

Now, this was the beginning of it.

Little did Fred Sawyer and Bert Monroe imagine what was to be the end of the undertaking in which they had so hastily embarked.

It was vacation at the Vancetown Academy, and being at liberty to come and go as they pleased, the boys spent that night at the Tippecanoe House, filled with anxious expectation.

Of course it is quite unnecessary to say that at the appointed time next day they were on hand and duly prepared.

In and about the fair grounds a tremendous crowd had collected.

The big balloon—it was one of the largest and best constructed of its class—was tugging away at its anchor ropes like some mighty monster longing to be free.

Inside the car Professor Hudson had already stowed away the stock of water and provisions, together with such meteorological and other scientific instruments likely to be needed on the trip.

Close below the car, and fastened to it by stout ropes, was the professor's patent parachute—an invention purely his own—cleverly contrived so that a huge umbrella, which, when opened, would support at least three persons, could be attached and take them by gentle descent back to earth in the oblong basket of light wicker work. The interior of this basket could not be seen from the car, for it hung too close.

"Well, boys, you're on hand, I see," exclaimed the aeronaut, who was flying about adjusting the ballast of sand bags as Fred and Bert approached.

"We are here, sir."

"If you want to back out, now's your time."

There was, however, no suggestion of backing out in the boys' reply.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" shouted Professor Hudson—it was half-past four now, and the old aeronaut stood in the car with our young friends beside him—"ladies and gentlemen, I have the pleasure of announcing to you that this is my fifty-fifth ascent, and under conditions so favorable as are offered by the weather to-day it promises to be one of the most successful I have ever made.

"My young friends, Mr. Sawyer and Mr. Monroe, will accompany me, and as the wind is due west it is probable that I shall effect a landing somewhere in New York State. Look out for my telegram to the editor of the Clarion. Now, then, boys, let her go!"

A whirlwind of deafening cheers went up.

Already the attendants on the ground had begun to cast off the fatsenings, when suddenly a tall, lank figure broke from the crowd and seized the edge of the car.

"Say, boss, hold on! I'm bound to go!" he shouted.

"Lish Sniffin, by gracious!" exclaimed Fred.

"Let go, there, let go!" cried the professor, striking the fellow's knuckles with a force that made him speedily relinquish his hold.

"B'gosh, I'm a-goin', though," roared the discomforted Vermonter, as he fell back upon the ground.

The lanky Yank was not to be outdone so easily, as was proven later.

Meanwhile the balloon had begun to perform the most extraordinary gyrations, flying this way and that with such violence that the boys were obliged to drop into the bottom of the car.

"Where is he, Bert—can you see him?" Fred was questioning when all at once something seemed to give way, there was a sudden rush, and the ground appeared to sink beneath their feet.

The Russellville Brass Band was playing the well-known air "Up in a Balloon, Boys," like mad.

Amid the general shouting a man was running along the crowd bawling something untelligible—the crowd surging after him, laboring apparently under tremendous excitement.

When the balloon started Lish Sniffin was seen to spring after the car and catch hold of a rope suspended below the parachute.

The crowd was awe-struck, and it was some moments before anybody seemed to find their voice, but when they did it was too late to do any good as far as helping Lish Sniffin was concerned.

"What's the matter?" cried Bert, springing up.

"Matter! Why, nothing is the matter," replied Professor Hudson, coolly seating himself. "We're going up in a balloon, boys—that's all. The crowd always act like madmen. It's nothing at a"

"It is a fact," said Fred. "I remember the last time I saw an ascension I was as bad as the rest."

"Yes, and so was I," answered Bert, "now I come to think of it."

The professor, however, did not see what the crowd saw, for he had not taken the trouble to look over the edge of the car.

It was the body of a man dangling at the end of a short rope which hung from the basket parachute below.

CHAPTER II.

LOST IN SPACE.

It was night—night above the clouds.

The big balloon, in the car attached to which our voyagers were sitting, was floating idly beneath the dark vault of heaven, guided along its lonely journey by the soft light of myriads of stars.

A strange calmness had come over the minds of Fred Sawyer and Bert Monroe, an absolute sense of rest and peace which under certain circumstances has been the experience of every aeronaut, and for which it is not altogether easy to account.

Long before the sun went down all sense of novelty had worn away. The fair grounds vanished, the people became as ants beneath them; towns and cities, rivers and plains, assuming at the beginning the aspect of some wonderful panorama spread out before them, had gradually become blended in one indistinct whole as the daylight faded, like a great painting not yet dry across the face of which the artist had smeared his sleeve.

The balloon had worked splendidly, the wind being exactly right. If the night had been made on purpose it could scarcely have been better than it was.

"I declare, boys, Old Prob's hit the nail square on the head this time," remarked Professor Hudson, shortly after supper. "I wouldn't wonder if we were to pass over Buffalo before midnight. We may be lucky enough to land near New York City. It would be a big thing for me if we should, for I'll make an ascent from the Polo Grounds and scoop a pot of money, you'll see."

"How high are we now?" questioned Bert.

"Oh, about seven or eight thousand feet, I should say. Do either of you feel any inconvenience in breathing?"

"Not the least, for my part."

"Same with me," said the other.

"People have a mistaken idea about inconvenience of balloon travel," continued the professor. "For my part, I never was high enough yet to suffer from anything worse than a slight bleeding at the nose."

"How high have you been?" inquired Fred.

"About 20,000 feet."

"And the highest mountain is?"

"About 31,000."

"Man couldn't live on top of it, I suppose, on account of the rarity of the air."

"So scientists say; but let me ask you, young man, who knows anything about it? Who has ever been there to find out?"

"But the higher we go the harder it is to breathe."

"Most assuredly; but I have a theory of my own in regard to that matter. We have to breathe simply because there is air all around us. It remains to be proved whether man, if he could be suddenly removed to the regions of space in which no air exists, would surely die."

"What!" cried Bert, "ain't that just a bit absurd?"

"By no means. Prove its absurdity, if you can. I claim that there is an equal chance that a man could live without air, if he could only pass through the region of rarefied air alive. Now, to breathe rarefied air causes exquisite pain, as we all know, and the pressure of fifteen pounds to the square inch exerted by the air inside the body—— Good heavens, boys, while I have been theorizing we've run directly against a wind squall! Throw out the ballast! We must rise above it! Be lively, now! There's not a moment to be lost!"

The boys were on their feet in short order, and were soon tumbling over the sand bags in accordance with the professor's directions.

Indeed, the necessity of haste had become apparent, for the heavens had suddenly darkened, and before they had time to fairly realize the situation they found themselves in the midst of a howling blast.

Probably it was a cyclone.

Its motion was rotary, and while dragging the balloon to the westward with tremendous speed, at the same time it sent it shooting upward with a rapidity positively appalling.

For a short time this state of affairs had continued, when Fred noticed that the professor had grown very pale.

"What's the trouble?" he inquired.

"I'm blessed if I know, boys," answered Mr. Hudson. "I never saw the balloon act like this before. We keep on going up, and yet somehow we don't seem to get out of the squall. Look here, the barometer shows that we are 20,000 feet above the surface of the earth now, and I must admit that I feel very strange."

"I'm almost frozen," said Bert; "and my head seems fairly bursting."

"Hello," cried Fred suddenly. "All the life seems to have gone out of my left arm. I can't move it."

"We've got to descend, or we shall perish!" exclaimed the professor. "The thermometer marks 20 degrees below zero now."

He raised his hand and attempted to pull the valve rope, an exclamation of horror escaping as he did so.

"Merciful heaven! We are lost!"

The valve utterly refused to work.

Meanwhile, the balloon went whirling upward.

They passed above the limit of the storm at last, and yet for some unexplained reason the ascending movement remained.

The professor was reeling about in the car like a drunken man, muttering incoherently to himself.

Bert Monroe had fallen forward, the blood issuing from his nose and ears.

As for Fred, although seemingly unable to move hand or foot, he was the only one who kept cool.

"Professor! Professor! What is it?" he shouted.

"Death!"

The word burst from the pallid lips of the aeronaut with sudden and awful intensity.

Tottering to the edge of the car, he made a feeble attempt to look down upon the dense masses of black clouds which obscured the earth.

"Death—the valve! Climb to the ring—open—God have mercy——"

He sank down in the bottom of the car all in a heap, while Fred, filled with a sense of horror altogether beyond the power of pen to describe, tried to rise from his place.

What had happened to the balloon was more than he could tell, but there could be but one way of interpreting the words of the aeronaut.

It was necessary for him to climb into the ring above and

open the valve by main force, or death would surely grasp them all.

But right here came the difficulty.

Fred found himself absolutely powerless to move an inch.

The paralysis of the hand and arm had extended to the feet and legs.

The cold was awful.

An intense black darkness seemed creeping over him.

Fred thought he was dying, so far as he was able to think at all, and he was trying to breathe a prayer, when all at once unconsciousness came creeping over him, and he knew no more.

What next?

Why, this—a shower of stones.

Big stones—little stones. Mere pebbles—giant boulders.

They are flying about in every direction; dozens struck the balloon, now a hopeless wreck and hanging down with its big bulk all collapsed from one side of the car; hundreds —yes, thousands shoot past it, and yet not a sound breaks the awful stillness of the surrounding space through which the sun is shining with fierce intensity, but seemingly with no greater radiation of heat than might be experienced in the tropical regions on earth.

Was it a stone striking Fred Sawyer's head which had aroused him?

Possibly such was the case.

Dimly conscious of all that we have just described, as he opened his eyes he seemed to hear a voice speaking as though a great way off say:

"Now, try! Rouse yourself. Do try! Oh, help him to try for his own sake if not for mine!"

"Bert!" gasped Fred. "Bert!"

His companion was bending over him, with a face so ghastly as to suggest the face of a corpse.

Down in the bottom of the car lay Professor Hudson, silent and motionless, to all appearances dead.

"Bert! Heavens! What is this?"

"Oh, Fred! Fred! Thank heaven you are still with me! Look! Look!

He pointed toward an enormous mass of stones dimly to be seen whirling about in the distance, for the balloon seemed now to have passed beyond their range.

"It means that we have ascended higher above the earth than ever man ascended before," replied Bert, solemnly, his voice still retaining that awful hollow sound. "It means that we have just passed through a ring of meteoric stones such as we used to read about in our astronomy books; it means that Professor Hudson was right, that where there is no air there is no necessity of one's breathing; it means that he, being an old man, could not stand it—that we, being young and strong, have stood it; it means, Fred, that we are in the ether; that our balloon is a wreck; that we can never hope to get back to the earth again. We are lost—hopelessly lost in the realms of infinite space!"

CHAPTER III.

IN SIGHT OF ANOTHER WORLD.

"Bert, this is something terrible!" exclaimed Fred, after a long interval of silence had elapsed.

Bert, who was leaning over the edge of the car looking down, instead of answering, suddenly gave utterance to a cry of surprise.

"Look! Look! he exclaimed, at the same time pointing downward.

Fred looked, and beheld an immense globe glittering like silver, far, far below.

"The moon!" he cried.

"Not at all. It's the earth."

"No."

"There can be no doubt of it."

"Are we moving?"

"With frightful rapidity."

"And yet we seem to be standing still."

"Watch the earth. Don't you see that it is getting smaller and smaller? We are caught in the attraction of some other heavenly body—heaven knows what—it may be a comet, it may be the sun."

"Look at the barometer."

The instrument registered a height of forty odd miles.

This was the height of the atmosphere—after that limit was passed it had evidently ceased to work. Thousands of miles would scarce have represented the distance now.

Long before this the boys had satisfied themselves that Professor Hudson was actually dead, long before they had discovered how grave had been the error of the earthly scientists in assuming that human life could not exist beyond the limits of an atmosphere.

Were they not alive?

Certainly they were, and yet—oh, mighty paradox—they had seemingly ceased to breathe.

Awed beyond measure they were still discussing the situation, when suddenly their ears were greeted by a wild and startling cry, and at the same instant a small trap in the bottom of the car began to move upward, and a man's head appeared, the face white with that awful pallor like their own.

"Heaven preserve us! What now?" exclaimed Bert, springing to his feet.

But changed as was the countenance before them, both recognized instantly Lish Sniffin, the man to whom Professor Hudson had refused passage in the balloon.

"Say, give me a hand, will you?" he said, gaspingly. "I—I've been drunk—I've just waked up. I'm most dead down here, and so I shinned up the rope! Where's this thing going to end?"

"He's been in the parachute!" exclaimed Fred, lost in amazement.

Then, as the boys extended their hands to help him through the opening, they found to their utter astonishment that his weight was almost nothing.

They had not paused to reflect that they were beyond the attraction of the earth.

"How did you come there?" cried Bert. "What in the world—— Fred—look—look! The poor fellow is dead!"

To their infinite horror, the Vermonter had no sooner been dragged into the car than he sank down beside the body of Professor Hudson, to all appearance a corpse.

It was useless to attempt to arouse him.

Hour after hour passed, and still he lay there silent and motionless, and yet the boys had ceased to experience the slightest physical inconvenience.

Had the man spoken the truth?

Was it the alcohol in his system which could not be thrown off without the aid of the lungs that had caused him to sink into a condition of unconsciousness, or was he actually dead?

These were the questions which they found themselves unable to answer. They could no even feel certain of Professor Hudson's death, yet there lay the old aeronaut rigid and motionless, and with a calm and peaceful expression upon his face.

Hours passed.

Now, the earth had reduced itself to a glittering ball less in size than the moon appears to us.

As for the moon itself, that they had not yet seen.

This they had pondered upon, but the reason they could not divine.

Still moving with wondrous rapidity, they waited for night, but night never came.

It could not come.

In their present position the sun must ever shine upon them until they had passed beyond the reach of its influence.

Yet they experienced no inconvenience.

It was neither extraordinarily hot nor uncommonly cold, but very much as they had known it on earth.

Pondering silently, Fred was leaning over the rail of the car wondering where it was all to end, when he suddenly perceived a tiny black speck at an infinite distance from them, which, as he continued to watch it, seemed to grow until it had assumed the shape and appearance of an enormous bird.

Long before this he had called Bert's attention to it, and great had been the discussion as to what it might possibly be.

"Look!" cried Bert, at length. "Don't you see? It's a whole fleet of balloons—six of them strung together."

"I see now what you mean," answered Fred, as the vision burst upon him. "By gracious, you are right!"

"And it has wings, too. Now look at it! It is just as I tell you—a big boat supported by six balloons, with great, flapping wings strung along the hull, and it's coming toward us just as sure as fate."

"What can it mean?" murmured Fred. "Whatever that thing may be it is certainly the work of man."

The sun was shining directly upon it now, when suddenly the wrecked balloon seemed to strike some new and strangely different medium from the ether of space, through which for hours they had now been moving steadily.

Was it the tail of a comet?

Was it a mass of that singular nebulous matter so long the puzzle of astronomers?

It might have been either, but we do not propose to speculate upon the question, but shall simply relate what actually occurred.

In an instant the sunlight seemed blotted out, and intense darkness came upon our aerial voyagers.

Darkness everywhere, save in one place far ahead, where the sun's rays seemed to penetrate in one gigantic beam, which shone directly on the mysterious airship, bringing out every detail with startling effect.

Filled with awe, the boys gazed upon it.

Yes, there was no mistake now—it was approaching them, or they were approaching it with a rapidity beyond their conception—they could see men—not one, but many—moving about in the suspended boat, which had a carved beak like some enormous bird, a tail, and those huge, flapping wings.

Fred, too deeply awe-stricken for speech, was about to grasp Bert's arm, when suddenly a sharp, sticking sensation in his chest brought from him a cry of pain.

"Bert, Bert, I——"

But Bert never answered.

Echoing Fred's cry came another.

Bert had sunk unconscious at his companion's feet.

Fred grasped the railing of the car for support.

His sensations were horrible.

It was as though some fierce wild beast was gnawing at his lungs.

Now the airship seemed to have grown to enormous proportions. He could distinguish the men moving about with wonderful distinctness.

One of them he saw raise a sort of speaking-trumpet to his lips, he heard the deep, hollow reverberation of unintelligible words, and then——

Why, then, the scenes seemed to have shifted themselves completely.

A wondrous, wondrous change had come.

The wrecked balloon had vanished, and its place six perfect balloons of enormous proportions floated far above his head.

He was lying beside Bert upon what seemed to be the deck of some sort of vessel, upon which strewn here and there were curious implements and mechanical contrivances, the uses of which he could not even guess; and, wonderful to relate, there were several men walking about who paid not the slightest attention to them, being seemingly engrossed in their own affairs.

Gazing upon them half dreamily, Fred saw that they were human being in every way resembling himself, except that their dress was a simple robe of blue cloth, which hung loosely about the shoulders like a night gown, gathered in at the waist by a leather belt.

They were bareheaded and barefooted; in height they were somewhat below the average men of our earth; the most striking peculiarity was the eyes and hair, for while the latter was of a brilliant yellow, the color of the eyes was blacker than anything he had ever seen.

"Fred! Oh, Fred!"

Bert had spoken.

Raising himself, he was sleepily rubbing his eyes.

"Where are we? What—— By George, Fred! I'm breathing again!"

It was just at this moment that one of the men caught sight of Fred, who was in the act of rising to his feet.

With a pleasant smile overspreading his face, he ran toward the boys, and seizing first Fred's hand and then Bert's pressed them against his heart, pressing his own against theirs in return.

"Ushmela ahmah si Margino!" he exclaimed.

These were actually the words—to be understood by the boys later on.

Seizing their hands, he dropped them toward the rail which surrounded the deck, and motioned them to look down.

A cry of wonder broke from Bert.

"Fred, we are coming back to earth!" he exclaimed.

Fred gazed in awe.

Below them lay a mighty globe, so densely enveloped in clouds that only in places could its surface be seen.

It seemed to fill all space beneath them.

Through the rifts in the clouds could be distinguished lofty mountains, broad seas, great stretches of woodland and plain, while directly below them, seen dimly through the mists, lay a mighty city whose towering spires and myriads of roofs seemed to glitter like gold.

"Bert," he whispered, too deeply awed to speak, "it is not the earth—it cannot be! We are descending upon an unknown planet—we are in sight of another world!"

CHAPTER IV.

ON BOARD THE AIRSHIP.

In sight of another world!

Wonderful sensation!

It is something often claimed by religious enthusiasts, to be sure, but in the case of Fred Sawyer and Bert Monroe, there was no camp-meeting business about it at all.

By no means.

There was nothing spiritual about the world upon which they were now descending, but, on the contrary, something decidedly natural, for, taken althogether, it strongly resembled the earth.

So much so in fact, that Bert, the incredulous, laughed aloud at the very suggestion that it could be anything else.

"Nonsense, Fred!" he exclaimed, as they leaned over the rail together, gazing down upon the wonderful panorama of sea and river, mountain and plain, which lay beneath them. "Nonsense, old man! It's nothing but the earth. We are landing in the center of Africa, or in some unexplored part of Australia where civilized nations exist of which the world knows nothing—that's all."

But Fred only shook his head. Better informed on general matters than his friend, because he had ever cared more for his books than for baseball and other amusements, he saw at a glance that Bert's theory was impossible.

Whereabouts in Africa or Asia or Australia can be found a city whose length is more than fifty miles?

Nowhere! Of course not.

Now, the mountain peaks over which the wonderful flying machine was passing must have had an altitude of fully ten miles. and as for the city which lay beneath them, with its myriads of roofs, its steeples, domes and towers glittering in the sunlight, Fred could see that the space covered greatly exceeded in length fifty miles.

Meanwhile, the strange men in blue had gathered around them, laughing at their expressions of wonder, and pointing at various prominent objects below, chattering all the while like so many magpies in that peculiar unknown tongue.

It was a soft, agreeable-sounding language.

As Bert afterward remarked, there wasn't a harsh word in it.

Suddenly a bell sounded sharply, and the men all hurried away, disappearing through a small bulkhead door in the deck of the airship, leaving the boys to themselves.

All but two, we should have said, to keep strictly within the bounds of accuracy, for one man remained squatted upon a sort of pedestal in the very center of the ship, at which centered an innumerable number of ropes, passing over as many pulleys.

These ropes appeared to connect with the valves of the different balloons upon which the man kept his eyes constantly fixed.

Now he would lean forward and pull one rope, again he would dart for another.

It was evident enough that these ropes controlled the motion of the ship.

As for the second man, he had charge of a curious wheel set in the stern. This might have been a steering apparatus, or, for all the boys could tell, controlled the wings, which were constantly flapping back and forth with all the regularity of the wings of some huge bird.

"But you really don't believe what you say," persisted Bert, as the boys continued to gaze over the side of the ship. "It's simply impossible that this can be one of the planets. You forget that it is only a few hours since we were in the balloon. Think of the interminable distance that lies between the nearest planet and the earth."

"Who knows how long it is since we left the balloon?" answered Fred. "Do you? I confess I don't. I—— Great Caesar's ghost, Bert! Look up there at the sun!"

It was the first time that either of the boys had directed their eyes upward, so intense had been their interest in that which lay below.

Now, to their utter amazement, they beheld, shining dimly through the heavy clouds above them, a fiery ball as big as a cartwheel, and yet, strange to say it seemed to impart no more heat than the sun throws out in early spring.

Bert was thunderstruck.

"There's no use talking, Fred, I've got to give in!" he exclaimed. "There's something wrong here somewhere."

"Big thing, ain't it?" a drawling voice was suddenly heard to say behind them.

Surprise was following quickly upon surprise.

A tall, lank individual, whose face recalled that awful night in the wrecked balloon, now came toward them and leaned one arm upon the rail.

"Lish Sniffin!" exclaimed the boys in a breath.

"Lish Sniffin, sure as shootin'!" laughed the Yankee. "Say, that 'ere sun is a big thing, ain't it? Gosh! how folks up to Sweezey will stare if I ever get back to tell about this; but I don't s'pose I ever shall."

"What is it—what does it all mean?" cried Fred eagerly. "You look as much at home here as if you belonged on this strange craft."

"You bet your life I do," laughed the Yankee. "I'm one of them kind of fellers what's to hum anywheres; but I can't tell you much about it, boys, except that you can jest go one higher than that 'ere land down there ain't our earth any more than that's our sun."

"I'm certain of it," answered Fred, "but do you know how we came here?"

"Of course I do. I was conscious at the time we was took off."

"Off the balloon?"

"Sure. You fellers had collapsed. Guess the whisky I drinked had something to do with my keepin' awake. Saw this here flying machine come alongside, and I give 'em the hail, but, bless you, they couldn't understand a word I said. One feller came aboard the car. He examined you two, and he examined the professor. Then he picked you up as though you'd been cork and chucked you on deck here. Next he made me foller, then he up with the body of the professor and chucked it overboard, making signs to me that it was dead, and at last he came on deck himself. You better believe I was scared, boys, but he gave me something to drink out'n a bottle, and after that I didn't know a blame thing till the day afore yesterday. Gosh! I did most think you'd never come to life again!"

"And you haven't any idea how long we've been here?" Fred asked.

"No more'n I have what your names are, but I guess it's a blame long time. When I first seed this world day afore yesterday it warn't no bigger than our moon, so you can form some idee of the rate this 'ere craft travels. But, say, here comes them blue boys with breakfast. You'd better drop right in, for I tell you their grub is mighty good."

The Yankee was right.

The breakfast proved excellent.

It consisted of stewed meat and vegetables, both of an entirely different character from anything the boys had ever tasted before.

As for their hosts, they were kindness itself.

Hours passed.

The city had now disappeared long since. Night was approaching, and the huge aerial craft was skimming along above a vast ocean, with no trace of land to be seen.

In company with the Yankee, the two boys sat upon a bench which was alongside the rail and watched the stars as they began to appear one by one.

Here they had been sitting all day, for the men on the ship seemed unwilling to have them enter the cabins beyond the bulkhead door, and when on two occasions they had attempted to do it they were gently turned back.

"Odd critters, ain't they?" remarked Sniffin, who had made himself perfectly familiar with our friends by this time. "That's jest the way they treated me. They won't let a feller see what they've got below there. By thunder, boys. I must say, I wisht your old balloon had been in purgatory afore I ever caught hold of that 'ere rope."

"That's what you got for drinking too much whisky," replied Bert. "I don't suppose you had the faintest idea what you were about."

"Don't, hey? Waal, now, that's jest where you're wrong. I knowed just as well as you did. I was bound to go, and I went. Didn't you hear the folks holler? How I wisht I'd stayed in Sweezey, and never come west with that blamed old bee-hive. Don't believe I'll ever see Varmount again."

"Look!" cried Bert suddenly. "There's the moon just rising. Ain't it a whopper? What do you think, Fred? Is this one of the planets of our solar system, or does it belong to another?"

"I'm sure I can't tell you," answered Fred. "I should suppose the chances were in favor of it being one of ours, for the distance between our sun and the nearest fixed star is some billions of miles, which couldn't be traveled in a lifetime. Still, we've seen such a complete upsetting of astronomical theories since we left the earth that—— Thunder and Mars! There comes another moon!"

Yes, there were two moons now, and as Lish Sniffin's whisky flask was entirely empty—a fact which he never ceased to bemoan—it is impossible to attribute to the phenomena a spiritus origin, as our readers may feel inclined to do.

Each moon was at least twenty times as big as the moon looks to us on earth, and as the second came into view above the horizon the boys saw that its apparent distance from the first was not greater than a few hundred yards.

But the marvel did not stop here.

In a little while a third moon arose, then a fourth, to be followed still later by a fifth and a sixth, which latter came up before the midnight.

It was a wonderful sight to see those six moons all shining at once in the heavens.

The biggest looked to be about the size of the top of a bushel basket, while the smallest was bigger than the moon of our earth.

The night was exceedingly mild, yet passing as they were above the ocean our travelers experienced some inconvenience from the dampness.

This the men about them seemed to understand, for they brought thick blankets of blue cloth, and made signs that they should wrap themselves in them, and lie down upon the bench.

This the boys did, the Yankee preferring to lie upon the deck itself.

Meanwhile, all the men had retired into the cabin excepting such as were needed to control the movements of the airship, which went sailing majestically above the ocean, the six moons lighting up the heavens with a brightness almost equal to day.

For more than an hour Fred Sawyer lay awake reflecting upon their strange situation, sinking into slumber at last, to be awakened by a loud, rattling sound.

It was broad daylight.

High in the heavens was that wonderful sun, looking even more gigantic than it had done the day before.

Bert was gone from the bench, and so was Lish Sniffin, but when Fred threw aside the blanket and sprang to his feet, he could see them standing with the men of the ship, who seemed to have gathered in a bunch in the stern, where they were peering down upon the strange world below.

CHAPTER V.

A WORLD IN FLAMES.

"What's the row, Bert?" asked Fred, joining the group in the stern of the airship.

"A tarnation big city that knocks New York all to thunder!" exclaimed Sniffin, taking the answer out of Bert's mouth.

But, in fact, no explanation was necessary, for far below them Fred could see a city lying upon the shores of the ocean across which their path had lain.

Its size was truly enormous. As far as the eye could reach interminable rows of buildings extended back into the interior of the country, while up and down the shore it seemed to be just the same, for the boys could distinguish neither beginning nor end.

"I believe we're going to land here," said Bert. "I was awakened a while ago by a tremendous racket. They seemed to be getting some kind of freight on deck, and they took it up through a hatch with as good a block and falls as ever you saw. Don't you see the boxes scattered about?"

Indeed, Fred could not help seing the huge packing cases which lay upon the deck in every direction.

They were very strongly put together and fastened with nails. Upon each case were curious characters marked in black.

Soon all became bustle and confusion, and the boys could not fail to observe that the ship was traveling at a very greatly reduced speed.

A young man of about their own age now sat upon the pedestal, and kept constantly pulling at the ropes this way and that.

All the while they were settling lower and lower, and at the same time moving forward over the housetops until now the ocean was lost to view.

Of course it was useless for them to attempt to question their conductors, and the men of the ship seemed to pay little heed to them, except to smile pleasantly as they hurried past.

Great quantities of boxes were brought up from the hold. This continued for at least an hour, when all at once a bell sounded, the boy on the pedestal made a frantic dash for a certain rope, and the great wings ceased flapping, and the airship began slowly settling down.

"We're going to stop, sure's a gun!" exclaimed the Yankee, looking over the rail. "My stars, what a place! Did you ever see anything like it? Why, New York is nowhere, and ez fer Boston——Gosh! You might pepper this here city all over with Bostons and not know where to look for one on 'em after you was through."

Indeed, the city was enormous beyond all power of description.

Temples, palaces, huge warehouses and manufacturing establishments lay scattered in every direction.

There were streets crowded with people and odd-looking vehicles drawn by the strangest built horses, while others were pulled about by creatures resembling no animal ever seen on earth.

As for the people, though they still looked like ants beneath them, the boys could see that they in every way resembled the men on the airship.

They seemed not in the least disturbed by the approach of the strange craft, nor was this surprising, for already Fred and Bert had counted as many as twelve similar airships seen in the distance, and as they continued to settle lower and lower they perceived beneath them an enormous circular

inclosure provided with many stalls, which looked precisely like a New York dry dock.

In several of these stalls great airships were resting, and a single glance was sufficient to show them that some were much larger than the one they were on.

"Say, Fred, we're going down into one of them pens," said Sniffin; "we are, just as sure as you're born."

"Shouldn't wonder. See the men down there are watching us."

"There go the anchors!" suddenly cried Bert.

The boy on the pedestal had pulled the rope with great violence, and in the same instant two heavy iron anchors seemed to drop down from another side of the airship, pulling after them ropes as big around as a man's leg.

The men below seized the anchors and could be seen making them fast.

Lower and lower settled the ship, until at last it rested upon a number of huge blocks of stone, hollowed in such a way as to receive its keel.

"They're going to get out," said Bert. "See, they are dropping the ladder down."

It was so.

One by one the men climbed down the ladder, and were enthusiastically welcomed by a considerable crowd of people who had collected on the ground below.

"Look here, Bert," exclaimed Fred, "it's time we were doing something."

"I should say as much," chimed in Sniffin. "They seem to have forgotten us."

In fact, every one had left the ship apparently except the boy upon the pedestal, who just then came down the little ladder which connected with the top, and stretching himself like a person who has just completed an arduous task, walked toward our friends across the deck.

"Looker here, we're going down," exclaimed Sniffin, pointing toward the ladder.

Just then a loud shout was heard from below, and Fred, looking over the rail, could see the men who had left the ship making signs for them to descend.

"I'm going, Bert."

"All right; I'll follow."

Fred flung himself upon the ladder and began descending, when all at once there broke upon his ears the noise of an awful explosion.

It was something terrific, and beyond all description.

First a long, low rumble, then came the intonation.

The ground beneath seemed to heave and toss like the waves of the sea, and the great airship trembled like a paper boat.

Fred clutched the rounds of the ladder in awful desperation.

On every side great buildings could be heard crashing down, and above the noise of these toppling structures arose a great and heart-sickening cry of agony—a mighty wail—an awful roar.

Suddenly the heavens became darkened.

Suddenly from out of the darkness shot up a vast pillar of flame, which seemed to penetrate to the very zenith, sending forth a withering, scorching heat.

And Fred?

Poor fellow!

He still clung desperately to his frail support, while the great airship, freed from its fastenings at the first burst of the frightful catastrophe, went whirling upward into space.

Above he saw, when at last he ventured to look, an awful sight.

To his eyes it appeared as a world in flames.

CHAPTER VI.

O-EYE! O-EYE! O-EYE!

Terrible as were the sensations of Fred Sawyer, he nevertheless managed to keep his head.

Though entirely ignorant of the nature of the dreadful catastrophe which had overtaken the city, he fully realized that while the airship remained intact there was still at least a chance for their escape.

"Come up! Come up the ladder!" he could hear Bert shouting above him, and as soon as he could collect his senses he clambered up the rounds, and in a moment stood upon the deck.

By this time the craft had ascended to a distance of several hundred feet above the city, and was moving upward with awful rapidity.

Upon the pedestal stood the boy, pulling frantically at this rope and that.

His face was as white as death, and even as Fred looked he saw him totter forward and fall heavily to the deck.

"Gosh! He's down!" yelled the Yankee. "Great snakes! Some one's got to work the craft. I'll bet a sixpence I can do it ef I try."

He had sprung up the pedestal ladder even while speaking, and now could be seen examining the ropes.

"Look! Look!" shouted Bert, his voice scarcely audible amid the awful din about them.

He was pointing off in the direction of the ocean, which was also that of the column of flame.

Column, did we say? It was no longer that.

It was one vast sheet of fire.

It came rolling toward the doomed city, and the fate of our little party seemed doomed, indeed, when all at once it was seen to stop and rush down lower and lower, spreading out beneath them as it went, until they seemed to be floating above a sheet of liquid flame.

Now not a trace of the city remained. It had utterly vanished before their eyes.

Yet the heat was not so great.

A peculiar density of the atmosphere previously noticed by the boys, seemed in a great measure to absorb it.

The Yankee had, meanwhile, evidently got the hang of the ropes, for the great ship continued to rise for a considerable time, and then moved majestically off to the eastward toward the huge glowing sun.

"What is it, Fred? Oh, what is it?" gasped Bert, finding his voice at last.

"I think it's plain enough, Bert. I can read this thing in only one way."

"What? I don't understand you. Heavens, how awful! Of course we are lost beyond a doubt."

"It don't follow."

"I wish to goodness you'd explain yourself."

Just then the boy came sprawling over the deck weeping bitterly.

He flung his arms about Fred's legs, and kissed his feet, seemingly begging for help.

Fred raised him gently, and pointed down to the sea of fire below them.

With a despairing cry the boy sprang away, and dashing across the deck, disappeared through the bulkhead door.

It was evident that no assistance in navigating the airship could be expected from him.

"Tell me what you mean," exclaimed Bert again. "You can't do anything with that fellow. Don't you see he's scared half to death?"

"Why, it's a volcanic eruption on a huge scale, that's all," replied Fred. "You know our earth has its central fires, which geology tells us have broken out at various times in past ages and swallowed up whole continents. Why should it not be the same with this?"

"You may be right."

"I'm sure I'm right. That's just what happened; you may depend upon it."

"But to swallow up that vast city! Why, it's awful!"

"Awful, indeed, but it's a fact, nevertheless. We are floating over the crater of an immense volcano now into which that city has dropped—houses, people, the whole business. Why we did not go down with it is a mystery, but I suppose the first shock snapped the cables. I can explain it in no other way."

"And, in the meanwhile, what's to become of us?"

"That depends upon Sniffin. Hello, up there! How are you getting on? Have you got her so you can control her yet?"

"Bully," replied the Yankee, coolly answered Fred's hail. "There's a rope for every valve. Some send her up, others bring her down. Some drive her forward, and others send her back. I don't know what makes 'em do it no more'n the dead, but I only know they do."

"If we could only get the boy back to his business, we might pass over this and strike down somewhere," suggested Fred.

"Do you s'pose there's any pass over it?" asked Lish quietly. "Looks to me as though that ere world was a goner, though where the blazes all that fire came from beats me."

"Can you see land beyond it?" asked Bert.

"Not much. I'm only about ten feet above you, and can't see no more'n you can; I was going to suggest—— By George, it's beginning to rain!"

They seemed suddenly to have entered a cloud now, for in an incredibly short time all grew dark about them, and there bust upon the unfortunate craft such a rainstorm as was never seen on earth.

Probably the cause was to be looked for in the immense body of heated air sent up from below, but be that as it may, our unfortunate travelers found the horrors of their situation increased a thousandfold.

The rain descended in bewildering torrents, awful flashes of lightning played about the balloon, followed by crashes of thunder which shook the airship from stem to stern.

At the first outbreak of this frightful storm the boys had joined Sniffen on the pedestal, and under his instructions were now assisting him at the ropes.

Suddenly a loud explosion was heard, totally different from the ever-recurring cracks of thunder. A rope which Fred had just pulled fell rattling to the deck, the airship at the same instant swaying violently to one side.

"That's one of the balloons busted," said Lish coolly, "and by the eternal there goes another!"

A second, and then a third report was heard.

It was so utterly and completely dark that the boys could only wait for the next flash of lightning to confirm their fears.

It came in a few seconds, showing them three of the balloons dangling over the sides.

With the next flash they saw that the craft was settling rapidly, and to make matters more unpleasant the Yankee at the same moment uttered a despairing cry.

"We're gone up, boys! She's busted!" he exclaimed.

"Don't pull at the ropes!" cried Fred. "Let's save what little gas we've got."

"Save nothing. The rope's twisted. It won't work. I wuz only trying to shut her. Gosh all hemlock! Hev we got to drop into that blessed frying pan down below there? Wisht to goodness I wuz in Sweezey. Oh, Lord, what's that?"

Suddenly in the darkness the huge machine had struck against some obstacle and was now grinding and cracking like a ship driven against a rocky shore.

"We've hit something now!" shouted Bert, for the din was deafening.

Now all three leaped from the pedestal, and hurried to the rail on the side from which the sound appeared to proceed.

"O-eye! O-eye! O-eye!" a voice could be heard shouting through the storm.

Was it the boy?

Probably.

Still it was impossible to discover him.

"O-eye! O-eye! O-eye!" came the shout again.

"Shut up! Consarn ye!" roared the Yankee. "Boys, there's something out ahead there. We've struck a snag, and the blame thing is goin' to pieces just as sure as a gun!"

It was so.

The cracking of timbers could be heard all about them. The strange craft creaked and trembled.

No wonder.

A flash of lightning coming at this moment revealed to our terror-stricken travelers a huge wall of black rock directly in front of them, against which the airship was beating with terrible force.

Suddenly something seemed to give, they moved upward, then stopped again.

"Jump, boys, jump!" the voice of Sniffin was heard shouting, for with still another flash came a vision of level ground directly alongside the deck.

Bert leaped the rail, Sniffin following him.

Fred was just about to do the same, when suddenly the airship began to move once more.

"Jump, Fred! Jump, and save yourself!" shouted the voice of Bert through the darkness.

But Fred did not jump.

Then back through the gloom came that singular cry:

"O-eye, O-eye, O-eye, O-eye, O-eye, O-eye!"

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE ROCKS.

A leap in the dark is something usually supposed to require a certain amount of courage; but in the case of Bert Monroe and his quondam friend, Lish Sniffin, of patent beehive fame, it would have required far more courage to remain where they were.

In the rush and roar of the storm which followed the striking of the airship against some unknown obstacle, it had been every man for himself, and the "old boy" take the hindermost with a vengeance.

Unfortunately, the hindermost was Fred.

Bert was almost frantic.

"Fred! Fred! Jump and save yourself!" he shouted; but the only answer was that strange, mournful cry again repeated:

"O-eye! O-eye! O-eye!"

The flying machine, meanwhile, had disappeared entirely, but, indeed, in the darkness and storm it would not have had to move more than two feet to do that.

Bert could hear it go slam bang against the rocks above him, and driven almost insane by the thought of the fate

which must surely await his friend, he made a sudden dart forward, still shouting Fred's name aloud.

Instantly he found himself sprawling upon his back. A heavy hand had seized his coat tails and pulled him down.

"No, yer don't, young feller," the voice of the Yankee was heard coolly saying. "There hain't goin' to be no susanside bizness about this. We are the lucky ones, Fred the unlucky; we can't save him, so I vote that we keep quiet and save ourselves."

Bert was in despair, but even the briefiest reflection showed him that Sniffin was right.

"I wish it had been me," he muttered hollowly, his speech broken by his sobs.

"Or me," added the Yankee. "I've not the least manner of doubt that you'd be only too tarnation glad if Lish Sniffin was off with that 'ere catawauling coon in the flying machine and Fred Sawyer here alongside of ye hanging on to the eyebrows of an unknown world. No, thank ye, Mister Man! Not any for Lisha! He's blamed well satisfied with things as they be."

"I shall never see Fred again," answered Bert dismally; "but I'd be willing to face any danger——"

"Neow, you jest quit," interrupted Lish. "What do you want to go flying in the face of Providence for? It was predestined that, you and me should get spilled out here, and that Fred shouldn't, so what ye goin' to do about it, say?"

"Where do you suppose we are?"

"I'll be close harrowed ef I know, but you kin bet yer boots I don't move one blessed peg until that there whalin' old sun shows his face again. I've got a footin' on this pesky planet at last, and cross-rake me ef I don't keep it. I'm goin' to stick here like I'd stick to a man what I knowed wanted to buy a bee-hive. There may be a good time comin' fer us yet, Mister Jones."

And stick they did.

In fact, they couldn't help it.

Four hours the rain continued to pour down in tubfuls, but the wind was less violent, and the lightning and thunder came no more.

Crowding together on the rocks, unable to see an inch before them, our friends could do nothing but watch and wait.

They were still watching and waiting when the rain ceased, and a faint light began to grow about them, until at last it was day once more.

Day, yes, but there was still no sun to cheer them.

Dense, leaden clouds obscured the heavens. They could not look ten feet in any direction without encountering an impenetrable fog.

"What are we to do?" groaned Bert. "I'm half starved, and every rag on me is wringing wet. We can't stay here. we can't go forward. As far as I can see, we might as well give up at once."

"Give up yer granny!" answered Lish, who had been moving about carefully, trying to penetrate the mists. "Just you brace up, young feller. We're worth a dozen dead men yet. Fust thing is to find out where we be."

This, however, was something easier said than done. Just then they found themselves standing upon a flat edge of rock of blackish color, but beyond that all was uncertain.

"Come on!" cried the Yankee, moving cautiously forward but before they had advanced ten feet he drew back with a startled cry.

No wonder!

Right before them yawned a fearful precipice. A step farther and they would have been lost.

A distance of twenty yards in another direction brought them to the precipice again, and it was just the same when they tried a third.

There now remained but one way to go, and they took the direction lying behind the point from where they had started out.

"Humph! This is better," grunted Sniffin, as they suddenly found themselves facing a perpendicular wall of rock; "there's something above this, and—good gosh! if here ain't a flight of steps!"

Steps, yes! They were hewn out of the rock, and were evidently the work of man.

"Come on!" shouted the Yankee, starting to ascend. "This is better, and by thunder it's getting lighter—we're going to have the sun in a minute, sure as shootin'."

"The clouds are certainly breaking away," answered Bert.

They toiled up the steps, which seemed interminable, and, gaining the top at last found themselves standing upon level ground, still the same black rock.

"Waal, we've got somewhere's anyhow," exclaimed Lish, cheerfully. "This is a regular exploring expedition—knocks Stanley and the center of Africa all out. Come on; if there's any grubb around here you kin jest bet yer uncle's going to find it. I could eat a whole round of beef ef I only had it, and I wisht to goodness I had."

For at least fifteen minutes they continued to advance along the ledge; it seemed to grow lighter and lighter with every step.

"Hooray! There's the sun!" cried Bert suddenly, and out from the clouds an enormous ball of fire burst with a splendor beyond all description. When seen before it had looked to Bert as big as a large cartwheel, but now its size seemed immeasurably increased.

Still they scarcely looked at it. Other things of more importance demanded their attention.

Now they could see that they stood upon a long and narrow ridge, with yawning precipices on either side of them, extending down to interminable depths.

Far below lay the fog, still enshrouding everything, while just beyond rose a small but exceedingly beautiful structure—a palace, or possibly a temple, built of the same black stone as the ledge.

"B'gosh! There's a house!" cried Sniffin. "Looks as gloomy as the county jail up to Sweezey. Hope to goodness they've got some breakfast in there for—great snakes and little fishes! If here ain't a hull lot of them boxes off the air ship spilled out there on the rocks. The tarnation old caboose must have passed this way."

There lay the big cases, sure enough, a dozen or more, scattered over the ledge.

They now hurried forward, but had scarcely reached the nearest of the cases, when up from behind a pile of three or four which had fallen upon each other rose a round head covered with yellow hair, which was immediately followed by a short body clothed in a single garment of blue!

"It's the boy from the airship!" shouted Bert, darting forward.

"O-eye! O-eye! O-eye!" he cried, and, with every expression of joy, he dashed up to Bert, seized him by the hand, and immediately began pulling him in the direction of the buildings.

"Hold on!" said Lish. "Not so fast—this may mean treachery."

A shout of triumph from Bert was the answer.

There was no need to urge him now. He was running toward the building at full speed, for a young man could be seen just emerging from the great pillared doorway.

"Gosh all hemlock!" cried Sniffin.

The young man was none other than Fred.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRISONERS AMONG THE CLOUDS.

"Bert, there's no use talking, we have got to face the music. Here we are upon an unknown planet, prisoners among the clouds."

Seated upon a rocky projection perhaps a hundred yards beyond the building mentioned in the last chapter we find our young aeronauts, Fred Sawyer and Bert Monroe.

The time is early sunrise, about one week later than the events first described.

And oh, such a sunrise!

Stop! Do not be alarmed! We are not going to describe it again.

We only want to mention that now all traces of mist had vanished, and showed the boys a vast stretch of country on every side of them, a country bristling with huge mountain peaks, many of which are rumbling volcanoes, with dark, wooded valleys lying between, and an ocean extending off to the far distant horizon beyond.

Now we find ourselves forced—and much against our will—to make this chapter, in a great measure, one of explanation, which we trust will not be found altogether dry.

How can we help it?

Having carefully deposited our friends upon an unknown planet, it would never do to proceed with our story without giving the reader some faint idea of the singular situation in which the boys found themselves placed.

Fancy being perched upon a narrow ledge of rock, per-

haps a quarter of a mile in length, and nowhere over a hundred feet in width!

Disagreeable as this would be under any circumstances, it is particularly trying when that ledge happens to be the top of a mountain more than ten miles high, and upon either side of your ledge is a perpendicular descent down a smooth wall of rock for more than two thousand feet.

Precisely this was the situation of our unfortunate travelers.

On earth the situation would be impossible.

No wonder that Lish Sniffin found himself perpetually wishing that he was back in Sweezey again.

Fred's escape was easily explained.

Just as he was about to follow Bert and Sniffin from the airship, the boy had grasped him from behind, almost insane with fear.

"The next thing I knew," said Fred, when he came to tell about it, "I felt the old machine tip over sideways, and down went the boxes with a crash. Just one minute more and she was trailing along the rocks. I grabbed the boy and jumped out, and here I am."

And there they were likely to stay, and there they would have starved, even before this, but for the contents of those blessed boxes.

It was the boy who directed their attention to them, and by the time they had hammered in the lids of half a dozen our travelers realized how fortunate they were.

Way up on the mountain top there was not even a blade of grass to be found.

The building proved to be a temple, but it contained nothing but a huge and exceedingly ugly stone idol, whose wide open mouth looked big enough to consume feed enough for a regiment at a single gulp, only there was none to consume.

None, at least, until they opened the boxes.

Had the men of the airship been off upon a trading expedition to another planet?

It was precisely that.

We are almost afraid to tell what was found in these boxes, lest it might throw doubt upon the absolute veracity of our narrative; therefore we shall only mention that if you had called around to dinner at that lonely temple six months later—it would have been necessary to have a balloon, and a good one, to reach it even from the ground below—you would have found our friends comfortably feeding on canned meats and vegetables, wearing some strange articles of clothing, and carrying as good a rifle and revolver apiece as was ever turned out of a Yankee shop.

It was the boxes—those thrice blessed boxes.

Not that these weapons were like those of our earth. No, they were different, yet the general principal upon which they operated was the same, for they carried cartridges, and were repeaters. What the nature of the explosive was our friends could not tell.

Strange characters on the boxes, and upon articles found inside of them, showed the boys plainly enough that they were not of earthly origin.

Where, then, had they come from?

Mars, Mercury, Venus or Jupiter?

It was a great problem.

Equally great was the problem upon what planet they had dropped themselves.

Months passed—a year has come and gone.

Still our travelers linger on that lofty mountain top, linger because they cannot get away.

Yet things have changed in some important particulars.

Listen to Fred as he calls the boy of the airship, using the singular name of Yyro! Listen further, and you will hear the boy reply in English not to be despised.

Still, though our friends can talk with Kyro, they know but little more than before.

Here is the sum and substance of it—then let our story proceed.

They were upon a world in most particulars like our own earth, called by the boy Margino.

The captain of the airship, Kyro's father, was a trader between this planet and another. This was all that Kyro could impart, except that he had been on several trips with his father; that the great city which had been swallowed up was his home; that traveling in airships was an everyday affair with the men of the Margino; that——

Well, that was about the extent of Yyro's information. By his own admission, he was a boy of the common people.

Unlimited cheerfulness and a warm heart, he certainly had; educated, even in the knowledge of his own world, he certainly was not.

And thus the days came and went, and when a year had departed—we mean one of our earthly years, for as yet the great sun above them had scarcely altered its position—our friends still found themselves where fate had dropped them—prisoners on the top of that lofty mountain peak, up among the clouds.

"O-eye! O-eye! O-eye!"

"Great gosh!" exclaimed our friend Lish Sniffin, as he lay stretched upon the flight of steps which led up to the temple one bright evening, "there's that feller Kyro with his blamed 'O-eye!' Never hear him, but I think of that awful night we fust dropped here—dod rot the critter! There he goes again!"

"He's run against something out of the way, you may be sure," said Fred, who happened to be just coming up the steps. "Where is he? Do you know?"

"Up on the roof with Bert a-star gazing or a-squintin' at them 'ere six moons, either one or t'other. Let him holler; I shan't bother. I expect to die on this mountain, and I'm a-goin' to take it easy till I peg out. 'Twon't be long, Freddy. The provisions in the boxes is getting mighty low."

"Hey, Fred!" came the voice of Bert, shouting down over the cornice just at this moment. "Hey, Fred—Lish! Come up here quick!"

The six moons made it as bright as day, and when Fred ran down the steps there was Bert standing on the flat roof of the temple, gesticulating in the most excited sort of way.

"What's the row?" called Fred.

"What do you think? What have we been looking for and longing for during all these weary months?"

"An airship, b'gosh! to take us off this 'ere pinnacle!" yelled Lish, springing up suddenly. "If you're fooling me, Bert Monroe, look out! I'm a desperate critter when I'm r'iled."

"Come up and see!" came the reply, and Bert's head disappeared over the edge of the roof.

Never had Fred ascended to the roof of the temple more quickly, and yet he had gone up the stone steps leading to it perhaps five hundred times.

An airship was their only hope—their salvation, for perched upon the top of a veritable pinnacle of rocks, almost a mountain in itself, with perpendicular cliffs on all sides, thousands of feet down to the next level, by what other means could they hope to escape?

Clearly airships must come there.

How else had the temple been constructed?

Kyro could tell them nothing. Of the country in which they now were he knew nothing. He believed that every human being on this planet had been swallowed up in that awful catastrophe but themselves; but he never expected to see an airship again, he kept saying, and it was an ominous fact that during the weary months which had passed none had been seen, nor was any sign of life to be discovered in the country below them.

But now, when Fred and the Yankee reached the roof, there was Kyro pointing to a large black object sailing toward them through the air between the fifth and sixth moon.

"See! De ship comes!" he cried.

"B'gosh, he's right!" burst from Sniffin. "She's a-comin', as sure as fate!"

CHAPTER IX.

OFF FOR LANDS UNKNOWN.

"You see her—what do you think now?" cried Bert.

"Three cheers for Kyro!" shouted Fred. "For months and months we've been watching for this! It is Kyro who has won at last."

But there was a shadow on Kyro's face, as all four stood upon the roof watching the airship.

"Me 'fraid she no come dis way," he said, doubtfully. "If it was only some light me tell better, but me much 'fraid."

A thrill of horror shot through Fred.

"Great Scott, Bert!" he exclaimed. "What if Kyro should be right? I never thought of that.

"He is right," muttered Sniffin. "That airship is heading off to the westward. 'Twon't touch us by at least a mile. Boys, we've got to get to work."

"Signals?" asked Fred.

"You bet. Bert, you and Kyro lug up some of them empty boxes jist as quick as ever you can. Fred, go down and get some of them fire sticks, and we'll make a whalin' old blaze in jest about two shakes."

The fire sticks were some of the treasures of the boxes. They were round and about six inches in length. By simply blowing in at a small round hole in one end the other immediately burst into a flame. It was Kyro who had explained their use.

The roof of the temple was formed of solid blocks of stone, consequently there was no danger in building a signal fire upon it.

In a few moments it was blazing fiercely, while the watchers waited in deep anxiety to see the airship change its course.

At last it had come so near that they could distinguish its form without difficulty.

It was constructed upon precisely the same plan as the one in which they had been passengers, but was somewhat smaller, having only four balloons and fewer wings.

The atmosphere which surrounded their lofty perch was exceedingly clear and pure, except at such times as clouds settled down upon the mountains, yet the temperature was always mild, and breathing never difficult, and what was more singular still, the eye appeared to be able to penetrate to a much greater distance than on earth.

Now, though it was night, and the approaching airship at least a mile away, it seemed as though they could look directly into it, still they could distinguish no moving figures upon its deck.

"B'gosh, they don't see us!" exclaimed Lish at last, despairingly. "Blast the critters! Be they all asleep?"

"Nobody dere!" said Kyro suddenly.

"What?" cried Fred, as he tossed another board upon the fire.

"Nobody dere—me see to times so far as you see. Kyro tell you true—nobody dere."

"I wonder if it can be so?" asked Bert.

"If it is, we're badly left, that's all I've got to say," replied Fred.

"Boys, it's true as gospel!" exclaimed the Yankee. "I've been squintin' at the deck the last ten minutes. There ain't a blessed soul aboard."

"What's the mater with Kyro?" cried Bert, for the boy had suddenly made a dart down the stairs leading to the interior of the temple.

Their curiosity was increased when they presently saw him crawling around upon the rocks at the very edge of the precpice back of the temple.

"What in time are you lookin' for?" yelled Sniffin.

A loud laugh was the only answer, but then Kyro was always laughing, so that might mean much or little.

In a moment, however, they saw him scampering back again, carrying in his arms a great piece of stone, loose lumps of which they had frequently observed lying about the ledge.

"He's gone crazy!" exclaimed Sniffin.

"Don't believe it," answered Fred. "Kyro, what in the name of sense are you about?"

"Me show you," replied the boy. "Me catch dat ship. You watch her—see her come! Dat's de way we get 'em when dey run away."

He placed the stone upon the parapet wall which surrounded the roof, and sitting down beside it folded his arms with a look of intense anxiety upon his face.

"Maybe not strong enough," he said at last. "Maybe yes—can't tell—try, see. Wait!"

"It's some kind of a loadstone—a magnet," suggested Bert.

"Nonsense!" growled Lish.

But there was no nonsense about it.

As they continued to watch the airship, they saw, to their unbounded amazement, that the huge craft was turning slowly, until at length its huge prow directly faced them, after which it continued to advance in a straight line toward the roof.

While before it had been somewhat higher than the mountain top it now began to move downward, and before many minutes had passed all doubts were dispelled.

Whatever might be the peculiar properties of the stone, it was evident that it was drawing the ship toward it with irresistible force.

As it approached nearer Kyro seized the stone, and running to the ground, placed it in an exposed position upon the cliffs.

Full of excitement, our friends followed him, stopping only to prpvide themselves with certain heavy ropes, which they had long since discovered in one of the rooms of the temple.

Perhaps they had been placed there for this very purpose. Who could tell?"

"It's all-fired amazin', but we're going to do it!" cried Sniffin. "Look alive, boys! She's a-coming!"

Lower and lower settled the huge craft, until her keel hung directly over their heads.

"Throw the rope around that big stanchion!" yelled Sniffin. "By mighty, I believe it was made for that very thing!"

The rope was thrown.

It caught the stanchion, and, having been previously made fast around one of the great stone pillars of the temple held firm.

Meanwhile, Bert had not been idle.

Making fast a second rope, he flung it about another stanchion at the stern.

As the airship settled down upon the rocks Kyro, with a shout of joy, seized a light rope which hung down from the deck and went up the side like a cat.

In a moment he had thrown out two heavy iron anchors, which Fred and the Yankee made likewise fast among the columns, and the work was done.

"Any one there?" shouted Sniffin.

"Nobody," called Kyro.

He was right.

The airshp proved to be entirely deserted.

In a moment all hands were on board of her; in less than fifteen they had explored the craft from stem to stern.

There was no one on board—not a soul.

The ship was filled with great cases of provisions of a similar character to those upon which they had been living for a year past.

In the cabin, which was handsomely furnished with carpets, tables, chairs—all of strange forms and peculiar construction—they found many singular instruments, the uses of which they were wholly unable to imagine—bottles containing strange mixtures, and in one little room opening off the main cabin were a number of parchment rolls covered with singular characters, which Fred thought looked like Hebrew.

Kyro called these books, and the imagination of Fred and Bert was excited to the highest pitch, but, alas! the boy in the same breath said he could not even read the language of the people to whom he belonged, adding that their writing was very different from this.

One thing, however, he explained to their complete satisfaction.

From the prow of the airship projected a long, thick spike of a whitish metal. Toward this Kyro raised the stone, when suddenly it leaped from his arms, and attaching itself to the spike, stuck so firmly that it took the united strength of Fred and Bert to tear it away.

So interested in the exploration of the different parts of the ship did our friends become that the sun was up before they knew it.

"Ready for a start, boys?" cried Sniffin.

"At any moment," replied Fred and Bert in a breath.

"You can run the machine, Kyro?"

"Anywhere—to one of de moons, if you wish."

"Gosh, no! None of that. All we want is to get off this mountain. We'll start at once. But how about that 'ere stone—will it let us get away?"

Kyro laughed.

"Shall we go now?" he asked.

"I say yes," said Fred.

"I'm there, too!" cried Bert.

Kyro ran forward, and taking up a long, hollow piece of metal resembling brass which lay upon the deck, carefully fitted it over the spike of the prow.

It was exactly the right size, and seemed to have been made for this very purpose.

Then Sniffin, by the boy's instructions, had unfastened the anchors, and they were pulled to the deck.

"Cast off the ropes!" he shouted.

Fred and Bert executed the order.

Immediately the airship began to rise, and in another moment they were sailing majestically into space.

CHAPTER X.

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN INTO THE FIRE.

"And what do you think of Margino?"

"Immense!"

"Immensely disagreeable."

"That's what I meant. Why, here we've been sailing for a whole week above a desert—a positive desert. Nothing but one eternal series of gigantic mountains, volcanoes, boiling springs and blistering sands."

"Well, you've about described it, Bert," replied Fred Sawyer, looking down upon the desolate waste below them, as the airship went sweeping through space at an elevation sufficiently great to avoid the tops of mountains. "So far as our experience has gone, Margino is a mighty uncomfortable planet to live on, and yet we are so much more comfortable here aboard the Xcuh than we were on the top of the wretched mountain that we certainly ought not to complain."

As hinted in the above conversation, a week had passed since the capture of the airship, or the Xcuh, as Kyro had persisted in calling it from the first.

It had been a week of continual wonderment, and at the same time one of disappointment, for the mighty problem—what was to become of our travelers seemed as far as ever from being solved.

Should they venture over the great ocean which lay before them, or should they keep to the land?"

That was the first question after leaving the mountain.

Kyro could tell them nothing. He knew that he had been brought up in a vast city, whose population, as nearly as Fred could make out from the boy's description, must have been something like ten or twelve millions, he knew that from that city he had repeatedly visited other planets which he would sometimes point out among the stars which shone above them, but concerning his own planet, Margino, he had little to tell.

Nor was this strange.

Take an ignorant boy out of the streets of New York and question him about Europe, Asia or Africa, and what does he know?

Nothing—absolutely nothing.

Just so with Kyro.

He was sure that there were other countries on Margino, rich and highly civilized, but in which direction they lay he did not know.

One thing, however, he did know to perfection, and that was how to work the Xcuh.

He was able to drive it any direction at a rate of speed which seemed almost incredible.

According to Fred's estimate, they had traversed a stretch of country exceeding ten thousand miles in length already, and yet nothing had been visible below them but the same monotonous succession of volcanoes and mountain peaks, and interminable stretches of barren plain.

There was not a tree, nor a shrub, nor a trace of human habitation, consequently there was no inducement to descend.

Here in the airship they had an abundant supply of food, and a large store of water was in the casks, which were constructed of one piece out of a substance resembling cork; on the mountain top alongside the temple there had been a never-failing spring of pure, fresh water, bubbling up from a crevice in the rock, but would they be successful in finding such a supply of the life-giving fluid in the desolate country beneath them? It was doubtful to say the least.

So the days came and went with little change.

Sniffin had constituted himself cook and steward, Kyro pilot and engineer.

At times Bert and Fred assisted in their duties, but during the greater portion of the day there was but little to do.

"Will it ever end?" exclaimed Bert that night, as the huge sun went down in a perfect blaze of glory, and moon after moon began to appear in the darkening sky.

It ended that very night.

By morning the long looked-for change had come.

Was it a change for the better?

Patience, and we shall see.

Early the next morning, when Fred came up out of the cabin, he was attracted by a shout from Lish, who stood aft leaning over the rail.

"Gosh all hemlock, boys! Look down there! Did you ever see such critters in all your born days?"

Fred looked and wondered.

Though the mountains still remained, the desert had now disappeared, and between the detached peaks (nowhere had the mountains run in continuous ranges as upon our earth) he could see long stretches of green fields intersected by streams of water.

They had descended low now, and it was easy to discover immense herds of cattle feeding—not such cattle as we know, but strange creatures, which in some respects resembled elephants, having huge bodies of a bluish-gray color, and long trunks, by means of which they seemed to pluck the grass and convey it to their mouths.

"What kind of blamed things be they?" questioned Sniffin.

"Don't ask me," replied Fred. "But look here, this means a different sort of country. Can you see any houses?"

"Not a house—wish I could.

"Look! Look!" cried Bert, who had suddenly come up behind them. "There's a man."

"And a six-legged horse, by mighty!" added the Yankee. "There's another, boys, and holy scissors, what a big feller he is!"

There was no difficulty in seeing them now.

Galloping across the plain at a little distance from each other were two men of herculean frames and gigantic stature, mounted upon beasts in every way resembling horses, except that they had six legs instead of four.

The men were at least seven feet high, as far as could be determined. They were naked except for a skin thrown about the loins, and in color were blacker than any negro the boys had ever seen.

"Do you see them, Kyro?" shouted Fred, looking up to the pedestal where the boy was seated managing the ropes.

"See what?"

"Those men down there."

"No—where?"

"There!" answered Fred, pointing, but at the same instant Kyro sprang to his feet with a startled cry.

"Quick! Be quick! Put on the cap!" he shouted, pulling frantically at the rope, which should have caused the Xcuh to rise.

"What's the matter now?" demanded Sniffin, but Fred seemed to realize the danger, for he sprang toward the bow and began searching for the brass cap which Kyro had previously used to cover the spike at the prow of the airship to prevent its attraction by means of the magnetic stone.

In a moment the cause of Kyro's excitement became apparent.

While studying strange scenes below them, the Xcuh had been sweeping steadily onward, and was now passing above a mass of cliffs of quite a different character from anything previously seen.

These cliffs Bert and Sniffen now perceived to be covered with curious tower-shaped dwellings of stone, about which a great number of people were gathered.

They were all black and of huge proportions, and there, standing upon one particular tower nearest to them, were six men, each holding in his arms a huge block of stone.

"Jerusalem! they're trying to attract us!" yelled Lish. "Fred, my boy, you want to get that 'ere cap onto that spike just as sudden as ever you can."

"But I can't find it anywhere!" cried Fred. "You had it last night. What did you do with it?"

"Put it back in its place, of course."

"But it ain't there."

Just then a wild shout went up from below, and to their horror our friends perceived that the airship was slowly turning downward.

It had been caught in the attraction of the magnet stones.

Abandoning the ropes, Kyro leaped from the pedestal.

"Bad men!" he shouted, pointing down. "Dey kill us—dey eat us up—be quick—oh, be quick!"

But it was no use.

Find the cap they could not.

"What the reason we can't break the spikes?" exclaimed Sniffin. "Where's that big hammer what was round here? We ain't got more'n ten hours to chin about it, nuther. Look out, they're going to shoot!"

A rattle of bullets confirmed this statement, and Bert could see that the men on the other towers were directing toward them guns with enormous muzzles.

The shots fell upon the deck like rain, but fortunately no one was hit.

It was too late to think of doing anything more, for the Xcuh had approached within a hundred yards of the tower, and Sniffin seemed to have experienced as much difficulty in finding the hammer as Bert had the anti-magnetic cap.

The fate of our travelers seemed sealed, when all at once the ship suddenly went whirling about in the opposite direction, and tilting violently forward, shot down with incredible rapidity, not upon the cliffs, but into a vast circular cavity beyond thhem, a huge crater, the bottom of which was indiscernible, with beetling crags surrounding it on every side.

As they flew past the cliff dwellings, a rain of bullets

greeted them, and they could hear the people shouting wildly. Then in a moment the sun was darkened, and they could distinguish the sound of rushing water.

The Xcuh was steadily sinking down into seemingly interminable depths.

CHAPTER XI.

A RIVER MONSTER TRIES TO INTRODUCE HIMSELF.

"Waal, by mighty! Somethin's busted!" cried Lish, as a terrific explosion rent the air.

It was followed by a loud crash and a fearful smell of escaping gas, and down came a mass of ropes and cloth sweeping past their heads.

"It's one of the balloons!" shouted Fred.

Even as he spoke, the explosion was repeated, and in an instant it came again, to be followed by a fourth a few moments later on.

Buried beneath the wreck of the balloons, almost suffocated by the rush of gas, and terrified beyond all description, our unfortunate friends lay upon the deck clinging desperately to whatever support they could find.

The roar and racket was simply deafening.

Fred, who lay upon the deck all entangled among the cordage, felt that his last hour had certainly come.

He could see nothing nor distinguish any separate sounds in the general roar, but after a few moments he felt the Xcuh strike violently against something hard and firm, after which came silence, broken only by the sound of rushing water.

After that the ship did not move again.

With great difficulty Fred managed to free himself and gain an upright position.

He at once perceived that they had reached the end of the descent, for it was not wholly dark, and his eyes were becoming accustomed to the gloom.

They were at the bottom of an enormous crater miles in extent; the Xcuh rested upon the rocks by the side of a broad river, which went rushing past with tremendous speed.

Her prow was jammed up against the solid wall of rock, which Fred immediately saw was of the same character as the magnetic stone found on the mountain. The cause of the disaster was now explained in part, but to this day the boys never understood the reason for the bursting of the balloons.

In a moment Bert came scrambling out from under the debris, to be followed presently by Sniffin and Kyro.

All were unhurt, and all equally puzzled as to what their next move was to be.

"Busted, b'gosh!" groaned the Yankee. "Well, we've set foot on something solid at last."

"Anyhow, we've escaped those giants," said Bert consolingly. "Hello! There's a whole ledge of that magnetic rock. It's easy to see now what brought us down."

"I'd rather see what's goin' to bring us up a blamed sight," growled Sniffin. "Looker here, Kyro. What kind of a shop do you call this?"

"Me know nothing," replied the boy, "except that we are alive. Dat enough. No be alive now if dose men had caught us up dere."

When the great sun rose higher, and its beams were able to penetrate into the crater, it grew light enough.

The height of the rocky wall was now seen to be at least a mile. The inclosure was circular, and the opposite side seemed at a very great distance away.

In the cabin of the Xcuh, Fred had seen some large rubber bags, which were now procured and filled with the cans of meat and vegetables, a few articles of clothing and some other necessities.

Shortly after noon the start was made, and for an hour they continued to advance over a smooth floor of rock, keeping the river on their left.

"Ef we only manage to fetch out of this blamed hole we may strike luck yet," said Lish, hopefully. "What do you think about it, Kyro?"

But Kyro had no thoughts on the subject just then, for at the same instant he sprang back from the bank of the river with a startled cry.

It was echoed by both Bert and Fred.

"Gosh almighty!" yelled the Yankee, clapping his gun into position.

And the exclamation was decidedly appropriate, for just at that moment a dark object as big around as a man's body was thrust high above the water.

If it wasn't a snake, it looked just like it, but, on the other hand, surmounting it, was a huge head shaped like the head of a horse, with a mouth armed with fearful teeth, and two huge saucer-like eyes.

With a loud hissing sound the creature made a dart toward Fred, who had been the slowest to move.

"Look out!" yelled Bert.

But Fred stood as though paralyzed, his eyes fixed upon the strange creature, and seemingly powerless to take a step.

In another instant those gaping jaws must have seized him, when suddenly a sharp report echoed back from the surrounding rocks, the water was lashed into foam, and the horrid neck went writhing and twisting back from whence it came.

CHAPTER XII

A STARTLING OCCURRENCE.

"Fred! Oh, Fred! Speak to us! Say that you are not hurt."

The next thing Fred knew he was lying upon the ground with Bert bending over him, while Sniffin was fetching water from the river in his hat, which he lost no time in dashing over the boy's face.

"O—w! Ah! What did you do that for?" cried Fred, springing to his feet. "There's nothing the matter with me. I—oh, heavens! I remember now. That frightful creature! Once it got its eyes fixed on me it seemed as if I couldn't move a step."

"Charmed, by thunder!" exclaimed Sniffin. "When I shot the brute you keeled right over just ez though I'd shot you."

"I know what it was!" exclaimed Fred, suddenly.

"What?" asked Bert.

"If you'd studied your geology a little more carefully you'd know, too."

"I know now. Plesiosaurus."

"You've hit it."

"Blessed-be-sore-eyes!" sneered Lish. "That's all bosh!"

"Plesiosaurus is what it is," repeated Fred. "In former times the same creature existed on earth. Their skeletons are frequently found in fossil conditions."

"I'll give any one a thousand dollars clean cash who'll land me in New York with a live one!" cried Sniffin. "'Twould knock patent bee-hives silly! Wouldn't I rake in the shekels? Oh, no, not much."

By the time the sun went down they had covered a distance of some miles, but still seemed to be as far from the opposite wall of the crater as ever.

The river, however, had now narrowed its channel, though continuing to rush forward with even greater speed.

It was an easy matter to leap the stream, which was now less than six feet wide.

Flinging their burdens down upon the rocks, our little party prepared to make themselves as comfortable as they could.

Fred opened two of the cans bearing a certain peculiar mark, which Lish always called the "toasting fork," because it had a straight stem and three upright prongs.

These cans had always been found to contain a certain kind of preserved meat which the Yankee called "lamb stew."

It might have been, but it was totally unlike lamb in appearance, though somewhat resembling it in taste. At all events, it was very good.

As it was entirely dark, and our friends had no means of lighting a fire, from lack of fuel, though in possession of plenty of those singular fire sticks already described, Lish and Kyro stretched themselves on the rocks as soon as the meal was completed, while Bert and Fred, less inclined for sleep, drew off to a little distance, and sitting down, leaned their backs against the rocky wall, and remained discussing the situation for an hour or more.

"What do you suppose is going to be the end of it all?" asked Fred, at length.

"It's hard to tell."

"Of course," continued Fred, with a sigh, "we can never hope to get back to earth again. For my part, I should try to feel satisfied if one could only get among the race of people that Kyro belongs to. Their cities that we had such a hurried glimpse of showed them to be not only civilized, but highly cultured."

"I'm afraid that's not to be hoped for after what happened."

"Well, we can't be sure. The region that was swallowed up

on the night of that frightful volcanic outburst may have been a comparatively small one. From what we have already seen of this planet I think there can be no doubt about its being immensely bigger than our earth. I only wish we knew which one it was."

"If it's our sun we see, then it must be Venus or Mercury."

"No, it is entirely too large for either," answered Fred; "and if it were Jupiter or Saturn, or either Uranus or Neptune, of course the sun would look smaller than it does to us. Now, my theory is that it is the planet Vulcan, the one whose orbit lies inside that of Mercury, you know. Of course I am aware that most astronomers deny its existence; but that goes for nothing, for—— Thunder, what's that?"

A loud, and exceeding shrill, whistle had suddenly made itself heard.

Springing to their feet, the boys stood listening breathlessly. A moment later, and the whistle was heard again.

"What do you suppose it can be?" whispered Bert.

"Blessed if I know. It seems to come from up the stream. Can it be Lish or Kyro?"

"Impossible! Neither of them have a whistle, I'm certain, and the man doesn't live that could make a noise like that with his mouth."

"There it goes again."

"Yes; and I tell you it's coming from down the stream, not up."

"Oh, you're mistaken."

"No, I ain't."

As he spoke Bert turned around and tried to penetrate the darkness.

"Bert! Bert! Help, help!"

Before he could turn back he was startled by a wild shout coming from Fred.

Suddenly a light of great brilliancy lit up the space about him.

To Bert's intense horror it showed him Fred dangling at the end of an immense hook, and being slowly drawn upward along the wall.

"Help! Catch me, Bert!" he was shouting.

But it was too late.

Struggling violently as he continued to ascend upward, Fred was already out of reach.

CHAPTER XIII.

SNIFFIN FOLLOWS FRED.

It was enough to make a fellow's hair stand on end.

So Bert Monroe thought when he beheld his friend Fred Sawyer dangling at the end of the huge hook, slowly drawn upward against the wall of rock.

"Help! Help! Save me, Bert! Save me!" the poor fellow was shouting.

Then suddenly the light went out, utter darkness came, and Fred's voice was heard no more.

"Lish—Kyro, wake up!" yelled Bert, dashing along the narrow ledge which separated the rock from the river.

"Hello, Bert!" exclaimed the voice of the Yankee, suddenly sounding right alongside of him; "that you? For the land sake, let's get out of this! The hull place's alive with them tarnal big critters like the one we shot further down this here blasted creek."

"Great heavens! you don't say so!" panted Bert. "Then Fred is lost!"

"Lost? How—what?"

"Didn't you hear him call?"

"Didn't hear nothin' but them critters a-whistling and a-hissing. Gosh! but one of them stuck his face right into mine and grinned at me. Why, his eyes were like two 'lectric lamps —lit up the hull place. You must have seen it, Bert, 'less you've gone blind."

"I've seen enough, Lish. Poor Fred's gone!"

"Gone where?"

"Up in the air on the end of a huge hook; at least, I thought it was a hook. It might have been a plesiosaurus with an extra long neck that caught him in his mouth."

"Is that so? Waal, waal!" groaned the Yankee. "I wouldn't wonder a mite if they cotched Kyro, too. Hain't seen a blame thing of the boy sense I woke up."

"Here I am!" called Kyro's voice, through the darkness.

"Where?" yelled Sniffin.

"On the other side of the river."

"Bert," said Lish, hurriedly, "we'd better jump over. We can't save poor Fred. It's our bounden duty to try and save ourselves."

But I can't leave until I know what has become of Fred."

"You must. Stayin' here won't do no good, and—Lord save us! Here they come! Run, Bert! Run!"

Suddenly the hissing sound had increased, and then the noise of a tremendous splashing was heard.

At the same instant the light burst upon them a second time, showing Bert and Lish the figure of Kyro standing upon the opposite side of the river, right here too wide for jumping, while between them was a perfect army of the huge monsters swimming one after another along the narrow stream, their long necks writhing and twisting like so many boa constrictors, with great bulging eyes glaring viciously and red, forked tongues shooting out as they flew past.

Suddenly the same sharp, piercing whistle sounded, repeated again, and in the next instant our terrified watchers saw at least four immense hooks descending from above.

In a twinkling three plesiosauri were dangling on the ends of the hooks, and amid a frightful hissing went spinning upward. The light went out, and they were lost to view.

"Je-mima Jenkins!" ejaculated Lish. "Did you see that?"

"We must leap the stream!" gasped Bert. "Sniffin, there ain't an instant to be lost."

"But gosh all snakes! we'll sure to be caught by one of them blessed-be-what-ye-call-it if we do."

"And be caught by the hooks as Fred was caught if we don't."

"But kin we do it?"

"I'm going to try, anyhow. Hark! I don't hear the hissing now. Perhaps they have all gone past."

"None dere now," shouted Kyro. "Me see."

"It's a go!" shouted Bert, and he gave the leap.

His feet struck solid ground, and in a moment Kyro was at his side.

"Coming!" yelled the Yankee.

Then came a splash, and following closely upon it the whistles were heard again, and the light shot up.

"Help! Help! Oh, gosh!" poor Lish was heard shouting.

And Bert, to his infinite horror, saw him going upward just as Fred had done, dangling at the end of one of those terrible hooks.

The hook seemed to have passed completely around the Yankee's body, his legs and arms hanging dangling down.

The next thing Bert knew he was lying upon the rocky floor of the crater, with Kyro bending over him bathing his face with water from the stream.

"You feel better?" asked the boy.

Bert scrambled to his feet with a shudder of horror.

"I'm all right. Lish—Fred—what can we do to save them?" he gasped.

"Nothing," replied Kyro laconically. "We think of ourselves. No use think of dem."

After resting and collecting their thoughts as to what next to do, they came to the conclusion to pursue their way out of the crater, which they immediately set out to do. They struck stone stairs leading upward and these they started to climb, soon coming to the top of those everlasting rocks at no great distance away.

They pushed on, and emerged at last into the full sunlight. Bert, as his head came above the walls, could not restrain a shout.

"Great Scott! What does it mean, Kyro? Look! Look!"

"Oh, me see!" replied Kyro. "Me no like—never! Must be Greymum. We hear about dat place before."

"Greymum! What's that?" echoed Bert. "I don't care if it's the city of Satan himself, so long as we get somewhere. Look at it—look at it! Did you ever see anything to equal it in your life?"

Nor was Bert's excitement without reason.

Big as had been the city which the boys had seen swallowed up by the earthquake, there now lay out before them one infinitely larger.

The ledge upon which they stood was perfectly smooth and flat, and about forty feet in width, descending in an absolutely perpendicular wall upon the other side down to a plain, which stretched out as level as a floor to an interminable distance—in fact, the end could not be seen.

For several miles this plain seemed to be a perfect garden, dotted with curiously constructed houses, which resembled immense haystacks embowered among trees of tremendous size, from which it was quite difficult to distinguish them, as in every instance these conical houses were painted green.

Beyond these villages lay a lake, up which odd craft of many different sizes and shapes were sailing, and beyond

the lake again came the beginning of the city; but where was the end?

Bert could not see it.

As far as the eye could extend there stretched the same interminable collection of huge cone-shaped houses. Domes, steeples, chimneys, buildings great and small—all in that same singular form, and all without exception of a bright pea-green color, which gave the city an appearance so remarkable that Bert almost fancied himself in a dream.

"Greymum!" exclimed Kyro again. "Greymum!"

Then he drew his hand across his throat in a peculiar and most disagreeable way.

It made Bert's blood run cold.

CHAPTER XIV.

GREYMUM THE GREEN.

"Greymum!" cried Bert. "Kyro, what in the name of sense do you mean by Greymum?"

"What you mean by Bert Monroe?" demanded Kyro. "Dat your name, ain't it? Greymum de name ob dat city just de same."

"Have you been there?"

"Never. Never want go dere."

"Why?"

"No want to be eat up."

"Cannibals! You don't mean it!" cried Bert in horror.

There seemed but little hope for Fred and the Yankee if this were true.

But what was to be done?

Here was an immense city lying at their feet, and so far as could be discovered no way of reaching it.

Bert looked in vain for the airships, which had been so plentiful above the other city, but there were none to be seen.

"Hi!" exclaimed Kyro suddenly, "what that noise?"

A strange sound, something like the cooing of a great many pigeons, was heard just beyond them; and the boys hurried along the ledge to discover what it might mean.

Presently they came to a large square opening in the rock, evidently natural, which seemed to lead by gentle steps down into a sort of cave, from which the cooing sound seemed to come.

"Zilla!" exclaimed Kyro, leaping forward, but he as quickly drew back again, and remained for a few moments listening attentively.

What were Zilla?

Bert asked the question, but Kyro did not seem able to explain.

"Nobody dere," he said presently. "Come on."

Running down the steps, they now found themselves within a large apartment—a natural cave, evidently—inside of which were four birds of gigantic size crouching upon the ground, and chained to the rocky wall.

"Zilla!" cried Kyro. "Zilla!"

"The birds?"

"Yes. Dey take us anywhere. We often ride on Zilla. Almost good like Xcuh. See?"

He pointed to a row of wooden pegs in one corner, upon which hung regular sets of harness of peculiar pattern, and informed the astonished Bert that they were intended for no other purpose than harnessing up these birds so that they could be ridden by man.

"Shall we go?" he asked. "Fly right over Greymum—find good men furder on."

"We will never fly over it until I find Fred!" cried Bert, decidedly. "If you are willing to risk it on one of those birds I am, Kyro—you have ridden them before?"

"Hundred times—oh, yes. Dey very good, gentle—oh, very gentle—yes."

They were odd-looking creatures, too, these Zilla.

In shape they somewhat resembled a huge swan, but the neck instead of being arched was straight and shorter in proportion to their bodies. They were not provided with web feet, and their heads seemed to bear more resemblance to the head of a pigeon than a goose.

As they crouched upon the ground, their great bodies, of little less size than an ordinary horse, kept swaying backward and forward, the birds all the while making a low cooing sound, which seemed quite ridiculous coming from creatures of their bulk.

Should he try it?

Bert scarcely paused to ponder upon the question.

Practically alone now upon an unknown planet, he found himself reduced to a state of desperation, which would have made him willing to try any means likely to restore him to his companions, for somehow the boy could not bring himself to believe that Fred and Lish were dead.

"Zilla take us down off rocks—Zilla take us wherebber we want to go," reiterated Kyro.

"Fire away, then!" cried Bert. "I'm with you. We'll ride the Zilla or burst."

Kyro ran to the pegs, and, taking down a strap, flung it about the neck of the nearest bird, which made no resistance whatever, lowering its head so that the boy could buckle this singular bridle about the neck.

Next came a curious saddle, which fitted to a nicety, and when this was in place, Kyro unfastened the chain, and leaped boldly upon the back of the Zilla.

There was plenty of room for Bert, and he immediately clambered up, seizing hold of a thick, upright peg secured in the saddle, and evidently intended as a support.

A curious cry from Kyro, then a rush and a whining noise, and almost before Bert had time to realize what was happening the great bird had fluttered through the opening, and spreading its wings to their full extent—a span of at least forty feet—soared off over the plain at a rate of speed which would have easily distanced the swiftest railroad train.

The sensation was singular—almost startling.

Bert's head was swimming so that he could only shut his eyes and clutch the peg for dear life.

On, on they flew with frightful rapidity. Moment succeeded moment, then suddenly Kyro gave utterance to a cry of rage and despair.

"Oh, Zilla, go down—go down—me no stop him!" he cried.

He was tugging at the bridle and shouting unintelligible sentences, but all to no purpose it seemed.

The Zilla was descending steadily.

Beneath them lay the great city, upon which Bert, now that he had recovered his head, looked down with an amazement which no words can express.

Interminable streets, lined with those strange green houses all shaped like immense haystacks, seemed to run in every direction.

They were crowded with people, and there were odd-looking vehicles drawn, not by horses, but in part by huge birds, built something like an ostrich, but having absolutely no wings, like the extinct Moa of New Zealand, and in part by singular beasts very closely resembling elephants, covered all over with thick, reddish hair, and having huge, curling tusks and trunks of extraordinary length.

As for the people, they were ordinary looking individuals enough, save in two particulars.

All, without exception, were short and tremendously fat, and the color of their skins, as well as the loose robes which covered them was a light pea-green.

No one seemed to pay the slightest attention to the boys, nor was this surprising, for Bert could now see as many as a dozen Zillas flying about them with fat little green fellows calmly seated on their backs.

"Don't try to stop the bird—let him descend," he said to Kyro.

"And be eat up by Greymum?"

"We can't help it. I'm bound to find Fred. He's here if he is alive. Let the bird go down."

Indeed, Kyro was powerless to prevent it.

However well he may have understood guiding the Zillas of his own country, he evidently had but a faint comprehension of the proper method of managing the big birds of this.

Lower and lower they descended. Beneath them lay a large square adorned with trees and stone statues of fat men with green faces. In a moment more the Zilla had touched the ground.

Bert leaped from the back of the bird in an instant.

As he did so a burst of wild music was heard, and along one of the broad avenues intervening the square was seen elephants.

There were two men standing upright in the car, which was preceded and followed by a dense crowd.

Bert caught his breath as he clutched Kyro's arm.

The men in the car were Sniffin and Fred.

CHAPTER XV.

A STRANGE SITUATION FOR FRED AND LISH.

When Lish Sniffin attempted to jump the river and join Bert and Kyro on the opposite bank, he made a bad miscalculation, for he struck fully a foot short of the shore, and before he knew it was floundering in the stream.

Here was the beginning of trouble.

Before poor Lish had fairly reached the surface, that same sharp, shrill whistle sounded, and the next thing he knew he was whirling upward through the air with the big hook fastened about his body at the waist.

Once he shouted for help, but only once.

It was quite useless, and the Yankee knew it. Where, then, was the sense in wasting one's breath?

Meanwhile the hook, which was so flat and very broad that Lish found himself lying across it without any more inconvenience than the shock to his nerves, went spinning upward at the end of a fine, but exceedingly strong, cable.

At a certain height it suddenly stopped; a hand was thrust out of a large window-like opening in the rock, and seizing the cable began pulling it in.

Now came the danger.

For Lish was not attached to the hook in any way—simply balanced across it.

"Look eout! Oh, gosh, look eout!" he yelled, frantically. "You'll spill me off if you don't mind what you're about!"

And it was too much even for the iron nerves of the Yankee.

Poor Lish's brain began to reel as he felt himself slipping—slipping—further and further, until——

Presto! All had changed.

He was lying upon a stone floor with a dozen or so of the oddest-looking beings clustered around him, all staring as though he were some strange zoological specimen, and there, too close beside him stood Fred Sawyer, half smiling at his astonishment in spite of the grave and troubled expression upon his face.

"So they caught you, too, Lish?" he said, as the Yankee leaped to his feet.

"Great grief, yes! Say, Fred, what sort of a crib do you call this? And them critters—they can't be men, yet, b'gosh, they seem alive!"

Fancy yourself surrounded by a dozen or so of naked fellows all tremendously fat and with skins of a light pea-green color!

Such was the situation of the Yankee when he recovered his senses. Can you wonder, then, at his surprise?

Chattering like magpies in a strange language, and with eyes big with amazement, they clustered about our friends, but without offering to touch them or do to them the slightest harm.

"Keep cool," whispered Fred. "They seem friendly, Lish, and we must try and keep on the good side of them. Do you know what this place is?"

"I do, then. It's a factory. These people are engaged in catching the plesiosauri. They had three here just now, and chopped them up and threw them into those big tanks."

"Gosh! Suppose they chuck us in?"

"That's what I'm afraid of. They were tremendously surprised when they pulled me up. The hook had caught in my trousers, and the first thing I knew I was yanked off the ground and flying through the air. They seem to have sent for some one—— Sh! here he comes."

Through the entrance to the chamber now came a man dressed in a loose green robe, and wearing a conical green cap upon his head.

He walked directly up to our travelers, and, bowing profoundly, addressed some words to them in an unknown tongue.

"How de do?" said Lish, coolly extending his hand.

The man smiled and shook his head, but he did not take the hand. Indeed, he did not seem to understand what the gesture meant.

Motioning to our friends to follow him, he led the way to another chamber in the rock, where a bountiful repast made up of strange dishes, some of which were exceedingly palatable, was spread before them.

The meal completed, they were conducted to bedrooms, and their conductor managed to make them understand that they were to sleep.

The room was magnificently furnished, and although bed, tables and chairs were all of odd shape, what was the boy's amazement to find that they were all of solid gold.

"Lish, what has happened? Where are we!" he exclaimed, springing from the bed.

Then, to his added surprise, he saw that Lish was dressed in a long green robe, seamed by a row of buttons extending from head to feet, each button being a glittering gem.

At the top was a huge diamond, next came a blood-red ruby, then a brilliant green emerald, a glittering sapphire, another diamond, and so on.

The robe, which was of a single piece of cloth, was secured about the waist with a belt of gold.

"What do you say to this?" exclaimed Lish, turning himself about proudly. "A lot of fellows as green as any Castle Garden emigrant took me up a while ago, gave me a bath in a gold tub, scrubbed me off with silver-backed brushes, and rigged me out in this here thing. By Judas! Freddy, I'm a walking pawnshop, and them fellows are waiting outside to serve you the same way."

"Lish," replied Fred, gloomily, "I don't like it. Do you know, I've had the strangest dreams."

"Same with me, only they weren't dreams."

"What do you mean?"

"That was mighty powerful wine, Fred."

"I'll never drink another drop of it, Lish."

"Big bird—flying through the air—old woman a-billing something over a charcoal stove—pretty fat gal hugging you, and all that sort of business?"

"That was it."

"It was no dream, Fred; you was only dazed. It all actually happened. We're in a big palace in the middle of a city, the strangest place you ever see."

"That's why I don't like it, Lish."

"Well, we may as well face the music. Do you know what I think?"

"What?"

"This here is the palace of the king of this country.'

"Well?"

"Them two gals is princesses."

"Humph!"

"That old crank of a woman was some kind of a prophetess."

"My idea precisely, Lish."

"She's made it out somehow that we've got to marry them gals, and raise up a new stock, a race of little greenbacks!"

Absurd as the idea seemed, Fred thought so, too.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAN WITH THE PAINTED FACE.

Strange as was the situation in which Fred and the versatile Elisha found themselves, it was by no means as uncomfortable a one—for the time being, at least—as that in which we left the boy, Kyro, and Bert Monroe.

The crowd was now surging toward them—there was no possible chance of escape.

"It's Fred and Sniffin!" exclaimed Bert. "Kyro, what shall we do?"

But Kyro seemed as though paralyzed.

There was Fred dressed in a green robe, as resplendant as the Yankee's; both were blazing with jewels, and upon the heads of both were small, golden crowns.

By the side of Fred stood a young woman, tremendously fat, but by no means unhandsome, had it not been for the singular color of her skin.

She was dressed in a long, green robe entirely similar to the one worn by Fred, and literally ablaze with jewels, but she wore no crown.

There was another female strongly resembling her, standing at the side of Lish.

Now it was too late to do anything, for the crowd was already upon them, but so intent were the people upon the triumphant procession that many passed the boys without particularly observing them.

Bert backed up against a tree as they went sweeping past.

He tried to catch Fred's eye, but failed to do so, but Sniffin saw him and gave a shout.

Before Bert could respond, several men came dashing up to the place where they stood; some seized him, others grabbed Kyro. In an instant they found themselves in the midst of a howling mob, surrounded by a perfect sea of green faces—there was not a man among them who could have weighed less than three hundred pounds.

Now, indeed, the fate of the boys seemed sealed.

The car swept on. Fred and the Yankee were no longer visible.

Tightly held in the grasp of four fat men, Bert and Kyro were being dragged along a wide street amid a perfect babel of shouts.

"Do you understand what they are saying?" whispered Bert, for Kyro was close beside him.

"Oh, yes. It is the same language dey speak in my city

Dey tink you are a god. Dey tink you drop down from heaven. Dey carry us to de king."

Suddenly the crowd broke out into a wild chant, in which all seemed to take part.

The street was packed with people; so closely were they pressed together that Bert could barely catch a glimpse of a long succession of shops, filled with strange articles on sale, with here and there a house which looked as though it might be a private residence thrown in between.

It was of no use to struggle or think of escape, and yet, all unknown to Bert, opportunity for escape was close at hand.

Suddenly a deep-toned bell sounded, and the movement of the crowd ceased as if by magic.

A second stroke, and all fell to the ground on their faces, each man dropping down just where he stood.

"Now is your time, young man," whispered a voice, in perfect English, close to Bert's ear, and almost before he knew it a hand had grasped his and drawn him aside among the kneeling throng through a half-open door, which was instantly closed and locked.

Now, it is quite impossible to describe the suddenness with which all this happened.

It was but the work of an instant—all done like a flash, and Bert found himself standing in utter darkness, with some one behind him breathing very hard.

"For heaven's sake, who are you?" he gasped, leaning back against a wall.

"Who are you, I might ask?" repeated the voice. "But don't stop to tell me now. Those fellows may be down on us any moment. We are safe enough now, though, for not one of them would dare to move until the bell sounds again."

And the hand clutched Bert's the tighter and drew him on through the darkness. Just then the deep note of the bell was heard once more.

"Kyro! Save him!" cried Bert. "I cannot abandon the boy."

"Can't be done," answered a voice. "I saw him—he is not one of us. He must be left to his fate."

"To be eaten?"

"Eaten! Nonsense. The men of Greymum are not cannibays. They are, in fact, first-rate fellows in their way, only they persist in defying every white man who happens to stray into their city. They make a god of him, but that's decidedly unpleasant, for as gods are not supposed to live outside of heaven they first load their victim with honors and then sacrifice him. Now, then, here we are, and I suppose you are wondering who I am, and how I happen to speak to you in your native language. Look! Behold a being like yourself!"

They had been hurrying along, while the voice was speaking, down steps, along dark passages, down more steps, through doors which were unlocked and relocked behind them, until now Bert, upon the opening of still another door, found himself in a small apartment fitted up for all the world like a chemist's laboratory, with bottles, beakers and strange apparatus, all made visible by an oddly shaped lamp which burned upon a little stand.

Bert stared at his conductor in ill-concealed amazement.

He was fat, his face and hands were of that same light-greenish color. In no way did he differ from the singular beings among which the boy had dropped so unexpectedly save in one particular—he was not short like the rest of the men of Greymum, but decidedly tall.

But the man scarcely gave him the opportunity to collect his thoughts.

"In heaven's name, who are you and how did you happen here?" he demanded as he hastened to lock the door.

"I came from the earth," replied Bert. "Of course, you must have done the same, yet——"

"Of course, of course," interrupted the man, speaking very rapidly, "but how did you happen to do it?"

"I went up in a balloon with Professor Hudson."

"Hudson! I knew him well. He—but no matter. Those two men who are being paraded about the city—who are they?"

"They are my friends—they came with me."

"I was sure of it!" cried the man in great excitement. "But how happens it that you are not with them now?"

Bert tried to explain, but found himself interrupted before he was half through.

"God be praised, you have come just in time!" exclaimed the man. "Of course, you would like to get back to the earth."

"Back to earth! I should say so. But I won't go without my friend, Fred Sawyer, I——"

"Have you any idea where you are?" demanded the stranger, who seemed to be possessed with a capital faculty for interruption.

"On the planet of Margino, I have been told. If you would only let me tell my story in my own way——"

"Time enough. Margino is one of the names for this planet. Do you imagine that big sun is the one you used to see on earth?"

"Of course."

"Mistaken!" cried the man. "From the earth that sun, huge as it is, appears but as a star. It is known as Sirius, the Dog Star. Young man, you are only a few billion miles away from home, that's all. Why, on our earth this planet, which is a hundred and fifty times as big as we are, is utterly invisible even through the most powerful glass."

"Is it possible!"

"It is so. I've figured it all out, and I know. This planet is much younger than the earth, also, and great geological changes are in progress. Why, only about a year ago a country three times as big as North America was swallowed up completely and countless millions of people perished. A sea now rolls where that land formerly existed, and I'm expecting that something of the kind will happen on this side every day."

"I saw that happen," said Bert.

"You?"

"I did. That boy who was with me belonged to one of the cities of that country. If you would only give me a chance to tell my whole story——"

"You shall!" cried the man. "What's your name?"

"Bert Monroe. What's yours?"

The man laughed.

"My name just at present is Alta Moozim," he replied, "but wait a moment."

He hurried toward a rock upon which a great number of bottles stood.

Seizing one he hastily poured a portion of its contents into his hands and rubbed them over his face, afterward wiping both hands and face with a cloth.

Now his face was quite as white as Bert's, and when he had pulled a stuffed bag from under his robe he was quite as thin.

"Do you know me now?" he asked.

"I see you are a being like myself, but I do not know you."

"Then you have not followed up the American illustrated papers—but stay, you are too young. It is twenty years since I left the earth. Bert Monroe, I am Professor Adamson—and a distinguished aeronaut. I'm tired of this planet—I'm going home. Do you want to go along?"

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT BERT SAW AT SUNRISE.

"Look at the plan; examine it well."

"I have already examined it with the greatest care while you were upstairs reconnoitering."

"What do you think of it?"

"It is an airship very much like the one we came in."

"Like it, yet different. The plan is the same as the Xcuh, with the wings, bird-like shape and all that, but you will perceive that I have made the balloons smaller and increased their number to eight, so that in case of accident to one or two, those remaining will carry sufficient gas to take us back to earth."

"A good idea," replied Bert Monroe—he was still in Professor Adamson's laboratory, and examining an elaborate set of plans which the aeronaut had spread out before him—"a splendid idea—but tell me, what is this gas which these people use in their Xcuhs? It seems to possess much greater buoyancy than the ordinary hydrogen gas used in balloons."

"It is called Biotum," replied the professor. "It is quite unknown on earth, and as you say, is admirably adapted for use in balloons."

"And you know how to produce it?"

"Oh, yes."

"But I don't quite understand yet. You just told me that the inhabitants of this part of Margino know nothing abut the Xcuh; that——"

"You misunderstood me. Listen, while I state the wole case. The Greymum—that is the name of the nation as well as the city—have no knowledge of the Xcuh except fom

seeing them fly over their country; they are the invention of another race, dwelling some thousands of miles distance from this city, called the Didimians. The people among which you fell were a part of this Didimian race, and it was in one of their cities that I landed when I came to Margino twenty years ago."

"But you haven't told me how you happened to come, yet," interrupted Bert.

"Oh, it was in much the same way that you came. My balloon was carried above the terrestrial atmosphere into the ether. I met an Xcuh on its way from the planet Mars to Margino and was taken on board.

"But, as I was saying, I first landed among the Didimians, who treated me very kindly. For years I lived in a city called Zayi, and supported myself by manufacturing airships.

"Why didn't I go back to earth? Why, because I didn't want to. I had reasons which I don't care to state, but seeing you has made me homesick, and I am ready to try it now.

"There will never be a better time than the present. You see, about two years ago, having heard of Greymum, and how the king had offered a large reward for any one who would build an Xcuh, I determined to come here and try it, so I stained my face and hands green, and traveled to this place in an airship which I proposed to sell outright.

"It was against the laws of the Didimians to do this, and so I can't go back there. Indeed, I couldn't have done so in any case, for my airship was caught by attraction by the black giants, who inhabit the country beyond the mountains. I escaped and succeeded in reaching Greymum. I obtained an interview with the king, who believes me to be a Didimian, and ever since I have been secretly working upon a large airship to take the place of those big birds, the Zilla, at present the only means the Greymum have of rapid transportation. It is about done now, and what I propose is that we rescue your friends, take them to the airship and all start for earth at once."

'But how can we ever hope to accomplish it?" sighed Bert. "The distance seems so immense."

'You accomplished it before, did you not?"

'Certainly, but——"

'You were unconscious and hardly know how it was done. That is the custom of the Didimians. They are very jealous of their secret. They administered a gas to you which has the property of completely deadening a man's senses for a long time and without injury. That is because they didn't want you to find out anything. They steer clear of the earth for the same reason. They know we are an inventive people, you see."

But the immense distance. It will take us a lifetime to accomplish it."

'Not at all. That is just where you are mistaken. You have no idea of the rapidity of travel through the ether. Where there is no great attraction and no atmosphere there can be no resistance. A thousand miles a second is nothing, and the beauty of it is you don't seem to be moving at all. Look at the rate of speed which the earth travels around the sun. There you have it. You seem to be standing still."

'You are certain of this?"

'Absolutely certain."

'How long do you estimate it will take us to reach the earth?"

'About a month—possibly six weeks."

'And there will be no difficulty in finding it?"

'None at all. I know our sun. It looks like a small star from Margino, but I shall steer straight for it. As we approach we shall easily be able to pick out the earth from among the planets revolving round it. Are you ready to go with me, young man? I intend to go, anyhow, so you must decide now."

'Where is your airship?"

'Over on the mountains, not a great way from the spot where you crossed. I chose to build it there because the thing has been kept a profound secret. Come, what do you say?"

"I'll go if we can rescue Fred and Mr. Sniffin," answered Bert.

A troubled expression came over Professor Adamson's countenance.

"We'll do the best we can about that matter," he replied "Meanwhile, let us take a trip to my work-shop. I have a Zilla in the yard behind the house here. We'll go at once.

The Zilla was found chained beneath a shed in the yard at the rear of the professor's house, which was surrounded by a high fence.

Before leaving the laboratory, Bert had followed the example of his new-found friend, and stained his face and hands with a certain liquid, which gave them exactly the color of the skin of the inhabitants of Greymum.

As they soared above the city, Bert, gazing down upon the vast collection of houses, could not refrain from an exclamation of wonder.

"Immense place, is it not?" said the professor

"Immense, indeed! What is its population?"

"Ten millions."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, and it is by no means the largest city on this planet. Zayi, the one I lived in so long, had twenty."

"Is it possible! And I suppose these people differ from us in almost everything?"

"In many things, yes. Their laws are entirely different. their religion is different, but, after all, they are men and women, and live lives much the same as ours. They engage in trade and—oh, there is the palace! There's where your friends are confined, no doubt. Do you see that high pyrimad standing on the great square before the building? That is the place of sacrifice. They will marry them to the princesses first and then kill them. By that means the princesses become divine. They have gods for husbands—you understand?"

It was horrible—too horrible to think of—and yet Bert could not drive it from his mind.

When the Zilla alighted it was at the mouth of a great chamber hollowed out of the rocks at the top of the mountain.

Here was the airship, a perfect Xcuh of excellent construction, and larger than any Bert had yet seen.

Day now succeeded day, each day bringing with it disappointment.

In spite of all Professor Adamson's endeavors—and speaking the native language fluently, he even went so far as to hold an interview with the King of Greymum himself and plead for the lives of the prisoners—no headway was made in the matter of rescuing Sniffin and Fred.

Two weeks passed.

The Xcuh was now entirely completed and fully provisioned for the long aerial voyage.

Bert was in despair.

He had kept himself closely confined to the cave, for the aeronaut thought it unsafe for him to show himself in the city unless it was absolutely necessary to do so.

"You can do no good by going back. Stay here," he said. And Bert stayed.

The professor, however, visited the city daily on the back of his Zilla, returning at night, with the same discouraging news.

He could hear nothing of Kyro. He found himself quite unable to do anything to bring about the rescue of Sniffin and Fred.

One night he did not return as usual.

Bert, who slept in the cabin of the airship, waited all through the weary hours in a terrible state of anxiety.

What had happened?

From a remark dropped by the professor that morning, he knew that the day of sacrifice must be at hand.

What if it should be to-morrow?

The thought sent Bert's spirits down to the lowest depths.

And as he watched that dreadful night, strange, rumbling sounds made themselves heard all about him, with occasional sharp explosions which shook the rocks.

It was tremendously hot, too, and growing hotter as the moments passed.

Just before sunrise Bert felt himself unable to bear the suffocating atmosphere of the cave any longer, and he went out and stood upon the top of the narrow ridge.

Far in the distance the lights of the city twinkled, while behind him, toward the crater, he perceived another light, which could scarcely be attributed to the sun, for even then the gray of dawn had begun to make itself visible in the east, and the crater lay directly north.

"What can that mean?" thought Bert, and he hurriedly crossed the ridge and looked over the precipice down into the big crater.

To his unspeakable horror he saw beneath him a surging sea of fire, completely filling the vast space.

"Great heavens, an eruption!" He drew back just in time to witness a sight so grand and yet so terrific that to do it justice is quite beyond the descriptive powers of our pen.

Further along the mountainous barrier which separated the floor of the crater from the great plain upon which the city

stood was a narrow ravine or pass—a break in the chain beginning at about half its height from the plain below.

It was just as Bert Monroe turned his gaze in the direction of this ravine that the molten mass thrown up from the internal fires of Margino reached the level of the break.

A vast torrent of red-hot lava was flowing down upon the plain, rushing, roaring, tumbling—a veritable fiery cataract.

Suddenly a terrific explosion broke upon the air—the torrent was increased a hundred fold.

The city was doomed beyond all question.

Upon looking down into the crater a second time, Bert saw, to his unspeakable horror, that the boiling lava beneath him had risen within twenty feet of the level of the ridge.

"Lost! Lost!" he exclaimed, starting back in terror.

Indeed, it seemed but a question of a few moments when the fiery lake must break over the ridge.

Just then a fluttering of wings was heard above him, and Bert, to his unspeakable joy, beheld Professor Adamson mounted on his Zilla descending in front of the cave.

"Quick! Quick!" he shouted, as he leaped from the bird's back. "The sacrifice takes place at sunrise. We have just ten minutes to reach the grand square in front of the palace if we expect to save your friends."

Could the hope to save them? Could they hope to save themselves.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FRIGHTFUL SITUATION OF SNIFFIN AND FRED.

"Looker here, Freddy, this thing is played out. I won't stand it no longer, I swow I won't. Here we are being fed up like turkeys fattening for Thanksgiving, an' ez fer me, I hain't drawn a sober breath in two weeks. Every day we're paraded around the city in them wagons, along with the fat gals, like a couple of prize pigs. It's all very well for them ez likes it, but, b'gosh, I don't!"

Unknown to our friends, they were already married to the fat daughters of the King of Margino.

All that had followed was simply in honor of the event, and it was part of the programme that the victims should see their wives only in the presence of others, a rule which had been strictly carried out.

"What do you s'pose the end of it will be?" asked Lish, after they had vainly discussed the situation for a considerable time that morning.

"I know no more than you do," answered Fred, "and positively I'm getting so tired of it all that I don't care. I rather think, though—hark! Here comes some one now. They are a good two hours earlier than usual this morning—what can it mean?"

They were soon to learn.

Presently the great doors of the palace were flung open, and, preceded by the king and at least a hundred attendants, Fred and the Yankee were marched out into the square, stopping at the foot of a flight of stone steps leading up to the top of the great pyramidal structure which they had so often observed.

Suddenly a wild chant was started by a voice at the foot of the pyramid.

Hundreds—thousands of voices took it up.

The din was deafening, and yet above it all came another sound.

Boom! Boom!

If a thousand cannon had been discharged at the base of the pyramid the report could not have been louder.

Instantly the heavens to the northward were lit up with an awful glare.

Now all was confusion—chaos.

The crowd was surging beneath them. Cries of terror, shrieks and groans went up from a million throats.

In the hands of the nearest of the black-robed figures was a long, glittering blade which Fred had been eyeing with anything but pleasant sensations.

Now suddenly the knife was thrown down and those about them fled down the steps, leaving the prisoners quite alone.

"Lish! What is it? What has happened?" gasped Fred, clutching his companion's arm.

"B'gosh, I don't know. Fust they was going to stick us and now they are all cleared out."

"But that light, over there! See, the people are running in every direction. Something has happened, and——"

And ef I was you I'd say my prayers," put in Lish, dryly. "They may run as much as they please, but they'll never escape that, you can just bet!"

And Lish waved his hand off in the direction of the mountains.

A huge wall of fire, hundreds of feet in width and almost as high as the pyramid upon which they stood, was advancing, in the direction of the doomed city, across the plain.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DESCENT OF THE AIRSHIP.

Fred gazed at the approaching wall of fire, in despair.

From their elevated position on the top of the sacrificial pyramid, he and Lish had an excellent view not only of the plain but of the mountains beyond it.

Now, as the sun rose, the plain seemed to have been transformed into a mass of liquid fire, while over the ridge a red-hot torrent foamed.

"A volcanic eruption!" cried Fred.

"Jes' so, and a 'tarnal big one, too!" answered the Yankee. "Freddy, this is a bad business; in less'n no time that fire'll be onto us. What be we going to do?"

"That's more than I can tell you, Lish. Shall we go down?"

"Where's the use? Hello! there's Kyro, b'gosh!"

He pointed beneath them where, in the vast throng which went surging by the base of the pyramid, Fred caught a momentary glimpse of Kyro's face.

It was a frightened expression, and as the boy was hurried past by those behind, he waved his hand despairingly at the two solitary figures standing upon the top of the pyramid.

Poor Kyro!

They never saw him again.

No, there was no use in descending. Unquestionably they would have been torn to pieces by the maddened crowd, for men shook their fists at the top of the pyramid, and dark threats were hurled upon them, no doubt, for every one seemed shouting something as they went rushing by.

"Do the blame fools think we brought the eruption?" muttered Lish. "No, thank you. Guess we won't go down."

And yet none attempted to ascend the pyramid. Probably it was deemed dangerous for any one but the priests to do so, and fanaticism is strong, even in the face of death.

Thus Fred and his friend were left to face their fate alone.

They had not long to wait.

The grand square of the palace stood near the city gate on the side toward the mountain—the worst possible location in the face of this calamity.

Now, moment after moment slip by, and the fiery torrent comes nearer and nearer. It has leaped the wall surrounding the city; it flows through the gates; hundreds of houses are burning like tinder, even the royal palace is in flames.

No more crowd!

The last man has vanished from the scene.

Thousands are flying to more remote parts of the city; hundreds have been swallowed up in plain view of the lonely watchers on the pyramid. Now at their feet flows a sea of fire, rising higher and higher, and threatening to engulf them in the end.

Thousands of Zillas float above them, with men, women and children clinging to their backs—the air resounds with their discordant cries.

Over on the plain, outside of the line of the flowing lava, a vast crowd is pressing, but as the stream widens with each succeeding moment, their chance of escape seems very slight.

They turned their gaze upward, and there, coming down to them, was an enormous Xcuh, with an old man working the ropes and a young man leaning over the rail. It was Bert, and he sung out to Lish and Fred:

"Three cheers! We're off for the earth!"

The great airship was far above danger now.

It had touched the top of the pyramid and risen again, carrying with it four souls instead of two.

For a few moments all were silent.

Higher and higher they continued to ascend.

Soon the land beneath them disappeared from view, enveloped in a dense cloud of smoke and vapor generated by the burning mass.

By noon, however, they had passed beyond the country which had felt the effects of the eruption, and were sailing over a boundless sea.

Already the huge planet had begun to assume a round

appearance, and by two o'clock the limit of the atmosphere was reached, and the cold and gloom of space set in.

Now our friends were suffering terribly, for their lungs were still endeavoring to condense the rarefied air.

"Patience!" said Professor Adamson. "We'll soon be in the ether. There'll be no difficulty once our lungs have ceased to work."

It was four o'clock when the Xcuh ran into the ether.

Then came immediate relief.

Now the unchanging light and heat of space began, and all sense of motion ceased.

Had it not been for the fact that the huge sun Sirius kept growing smaller and smaller, it would have been quite impossible to tell that they were not standing still.

Soon Margino vanished, and shortly after that the Xcuh ran out of sight of the last of its moons.

Day succeeded day, week followed week, and still the great airship sped on.

The fourth week passed, and still the sun toward which they were steering had not materially increased its size.

The boys now began to grow nervous.

When the fifth week went by and brought no change, Lish commenced to kick out loud.

"B'gosh, it strikes me very forcibly that you're steering for the wrong sun, mister," he said to Professor Adamson one day. "Either that or you're theory is all a fake, and we ain't moving at all. It would be a great note ef we wuz to keep on hangin' up here betwixt heaven and earth till old Gabriel toots his horn!"

Though he laughed at this sally, Bert could see a shade of anxiety cross the professor's face.

It was Bert's turn to relieve the aeronaut at a certain hour. Midnight they called it, though there was no difference from midday.

Fred and Lish were asleep in the cabin, when Bert suddenly heard a whistle.

It was the professor's signal calling him on deck.

Hurrying up the companion ladder, he was just moving toward the pedestal when all at once a sharp pain shot across his chest.

This was followed by a violent fit of coughing, during which the pain grew worse.

Professor Adamson was coughing, too, and now up from the cabin came Fred and Lish in the same distressing state.

"Look off there!" shouted the professor, once he could gain his breath.

They looked and saw that the sun had now increased to something like its natural size.

"We've struck the atmosphere!" shouted Fred. "I don't know how it is with the rest of you, but I'm breathing again."

"Look down there, fellows!" yelled Lish, suddenly.

Bert and Fred bent over the rail, and beheld far beneath them a huge silvery globe suspended in space.

"Well, boys, who was right now?" said the professor calmly.

"You, b'gosh!" cried Sniffin. "Do you see them black things? Them's continents."

"Africa! Europe!" shouted Bert. "It's just like looking at an immense school globe."

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

"Can you make out where we are?"

"Indeed, I can't, Fred. I can't see a thing. Heavens! how the rain comes down! Did you ever see lightning sharper than that flash?"

But Fred's answer was drowned amid the rattling peal of thunder which followed, and in the darkness and storm the great airship went sweeping on.

They were close to earth now, descending in the night, and in the very teeth of a furious tempest, but where no one on board had the faintest idea.

Every ounce of gas had been discharged from seven of the balloons, and Professor Adamson stood bravely at his post holding the valve rope of the eighth ready to pull at a moment's notice.

Lish was forward on the lookout.

"Let her go!" he yelled suddenly. "Let her go, and be blessed quick about it, too!"

The professor pulled the rope with all his strength; in a few moments the Xcuh was trailing over water, and there burst upon our travelers a mighty roar.

"Where are we, Lish? Can you make out?" called the professor from the pedestal.

"Jump! Jump, and save yourselves!" shouted Lish fitting the action to the word.

The airship was skimming over the ground, while the roar had become almost deafening. In an instant the point of land was passed, and the great Xcuh dropped into the water beyond.

But our friends had left her.

Following Sniffin's advice, all hands had leaped to the ground, and now stood shivering in the drenching rain.

"What is it?" cried Fred. "We were in no danger. It's only a river. Why, you can see the opposite bank!"

Aye, it was only a river, but what a river!

Suddenly the roar grew louder, and following closely came a mighty crash.

At the same instant a brilliant flash of lightning illuminated the scene with the brightness of day.

It showed them how close the shrewd Yankee had been to the truth.

But this was not all.

There, just ahead of them, was the airship rushing down a watery precipice; even before the flash had passed they had seen it dashed into a thousand pieces upon the rocks below.

* * * * * * * * *

(From the Buffalo American of the next day.)

"A MYSTERY AT NIAGARA FALLS.

"Between two and three o'clock this morning, during the most terrific thunder storm ever known in this locality, a full-rigged ship was distinctly seen by certain persons, both in Niagara Falls and Clifton, to go over the American Falls. As no cries for help were heard, and it seemed quite impossible that a ship could be in this part of the river, the story was hooted at this morning, but, strange to say, dispatches from Lewiston and lake points seem to confirm it. Wreckage was certainly seen sweeping down the river, and, strange to say, among other things were two huge bags which strongly resembled balloons. Who can explain the mystery? We confess that this is about the toughest yarn we ever put in print, but it seems to be true."

* * * * * * * * *

Who could explain the mystery?

"Why, our friends, Fred Sawyer and Bert Monroe, to be sure.

Professor Adamson and Brother Sniffin might also have thrown some light on it.

Indeed, Lish actually went to the office of the Buffalo paper and began to talk about it, but before he had spoken five minutes he was taken by the neck and pitched out.

"B'gosh, they took me for a lunatic!" he said afterward. "It's a blessed job I didn't get locked up."

And the experience of the Yankee was the experience of all.

Not a soul could be found who would even listen to the strange tale our friends had to tell.

Fred and Bert reached home in due time, but when they attempted to tell their story not even their parents would believe a word they said.

"You ran away from school, you rascal!" stormed Mr. Sawyer, as soon as Fred opened his mouth. "Tell me any more nonsense and I'll lock you up in an asylum."

It was hard, but the boys were forced to submit to it nevertheless.

Sniffin went back to Sweezey, where he is now, working the farm, and enjoys the reputation of being the biggest liar in the State of Vermont, for poor Lish positively cannot hold his tongue.

As for Professor Adamson, the last the boys heard of him was in New York city, where he was working secretly upon an immense airship.

If it is ever completed it is not impossible that our friends may take a trip to some unknown planet again.

Next's weeks issue will contain "THE TWO DIAMONDS; OR, A MYSTERY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN MINES."

SEND POSTAL FOR OUR FREE CATALOGUE
DIME NOVELS
BOUGHT & SOLD
CHARLES BRAGIN
1525 W. 12th St.
Brooklyn 4, N. Y.

PLUCK AND LUCK.

CONTAINS ALL SORTS OF STORIES. EVERY STORY COMPLETE.

32 PAGES. BEAUTIFULLY COLORED COVERS.

LATEST ISSUES:

72 The Boy Silver King; or, The Mystery of Two Lives, by Allyn Draper
73 The Floating School; or, Dr. Bircham's Bad Boys' Academy, by Howard Austin
74 Frank Fair in Congress; or, A Boy Among Our Lawmakers, by Hal Standish
75 Dunning & Co., the Boy Brokers, by a Retired Broker
76 The Rocket; or, Adventures in the Air, by Allyn Draper
77 The First Glass; or, The Woes of Wine, by Jno. B. Dowd
78 Will, the Whaler, by Capt. Thos. H. Wilson
79 The Demon of the Desert, by Jas. C. Merritt
80 Captain Lucifer; or, The Secret of the Slave Ship, by Howard Austin
81 Nat o' the Night, by Berton Bertrew
82 The Search for the Sunken Ship, by Capt. Thos. H. Wilson
83 Dick Duncan; or, The Blight of the Bowl, by Jno. B. Dowd
84 Daring Dan, the Pride of the Pedee, by General Jas. A. Gordon
85 The Iron Spirit; or, The Mysteries of the Plains, by an Old Scout
86 Rolly Rock; or, Chasing the Mountain Bandits, by Jas. C. Merritt
87 Five Years in the Grassy Sea, by Capt. Thos. H. Wilson
88 The Mysterious Cave, by Allyn Draper
89 The Fly-by-Nights; or, The Mysterious Riders of the Revolution, by Berton Bertrew
90 The Golden Idol, by Howard Austin
91 The Red House; or, The Mystery of Dead Man's Bluff, by Jas. C. Merritt
92 The Discarded Son; or, The Curse of Drink, by Jno. B. Dowd
93 General Crook's Boy Scout; or, Beyond the Sierra Madres, by an Old Scout
94 The Bullet Charmer. A Story of the American Revolution, by Berton Bertrew
95 On a Floating Wreck; or, Drifting Around the World, by Capt. Thos. H. Wilson
96 The French Wolves, by Allyn Draper
97 A Desperate Game; or, The Mystery of Dion Travers' Life, by Howard Austin
98 The Young King; or, Dick Dunn in Search of His Brother, by Jas. C. Merritt
99 Joe Jeckel, The Prince of Firemen, by Ex Fire Chief Warden
100 The Boy Railroad King; or, Fighting for a Fortune, by Jas. C. Merritt
101 Frozen In; or, An American Boy's Luck, by Howard Austin
102 Toney, the Boy Clown; or, Across the Continent With a Circus, by Berton Bertrew
103 His First Drink; or, Wrecked by Wine, by Jno. B. Dowd
104 The Little Captain; or, The Island of Gold, by Capt. Thos. H. Wilson
105 The Merman of Killarney; or, The Outlaw of the Lake, by Allyn Draper
106 In the Ice. A Story of the Arctic Regions, by Howard Austin
107 Arnold's Shadow, or, The Traitor's Nemesis, by General Jas. A. Gordon
108 The Broken Pledge; or, Downward, Step by Step, by Jno. B. Dowd
109 Old Disaster; or, The Perils of the Pioneers, by an Old Scout
110 The Haunted Mansion. A tale of Mystery, by Allyn Draper
111 No. 6; or, The Young Firemen of Carbondale, by Ex Fire Chief Warden
112 Deserted; or, Thrilling Adventures in the Frozen North, by Howard Austin
113 A Glass of Wine; or, Ruined by a Social Club, by Jno. B. Dowd
114 The Three Doors; or, Half a Million in Gold, by Jas. C. Merritt
115 The Deep Sea Treasure; or, Adventures Afloat and Ashore, by Capt. Thos. H. Wilson
116 Mustang Matt, The Prince of Cowboys, by an Old Scout
117 The Wild Bull of Kerry; or, A Battle for Life, by Allyn Draper
118 The Scarlet Shroud; or, The Fate of the Five, by Howard Austin
119 Brake and Throttle; or, A Boy Engineer's Luck, by Jas. C. Merritt
120 Two Old Coins; or, Found in the Elephant Cave, by Richard R. Montgomery
121 The Boy Courier of Siberia; or, The League of the Russian Prison Mines, by Allan Arnold
122 The Secret of Page 99; or, An Old Book Cover, by Allyn Draper
123 Resolute No. 10; or, The Boy Fire Company of Fulton, by Ex Fire Chief Warden
124 The Boy Scouts of the Susquehanna; or, The Young Heroes of the Wyoming Valley, by an Old Scout
125 The Boy Banker; or, From a Cent to a Million, by H. K. Shackleford
126 Shore Line Sam, the Young Southern Engineer; or, Railroading in War Times, by Jas. C. Merritt
127 On the Brink; or, The Perils of Social Drinking, by Jno. B. Dowd
128 The 12th of October, 1863, by Allyn Draper
129 Through an Unknown Land; or, The Boy Canoeist of the Quanza, by Allan Arnold
130 The Blue Door. A Romance of Mystery, by Richard R. Montgomery
131 Running with No. 6; or, The Boy Firemen of Franklin, by Ex Fire Chief Warden
132 Little Red Cloud, The Boy Indian Chief, by an Old Scout
133 Safety-Valve Steve; or, The Boy Engineer of the R. H. & W., by Jas. C. Merritt
134 The Drunkard's Victim, by Jno. B. Dowd
135 Abandoned; or, The Wolf Man of the Island, by Capt. Thos. H. Wilson
136 The Two Schools at Oakdale; or, The Rival Students of Corrina Lake, by Allyn Draper
137 The Farmer's Son; or, A Young Clerk's Downfall. A Story of Country and City Life, by Howard Austin
138 The Old Stone Jug; or, Wine, Cards and Ruin, by Jno. B. Dowd
139 Jack Wright and His Deep Sea Monitor; or, Searching for a Ton of Gold, by "Noname"
140 The Richest Boy in the World; or, The Wonderful Adventures of a Young American, by Allyn Draper
141 The Haunted Lake. A Strange Story, by Allyn Draper
142 In the Frozen North; or, Ten Years in the Ice, by Howard Austin
143 Around the World on a Bicycle. A Story of Adventures in Many Lands, by Jas. C. Merritt
144 Young Captain Rock; or, The First of the White Boys, by Allyn Draper
145 A Sheet of Blotting Paper; or, The Adventures of a Young Inventor, by Richard R. Montgomery
146 The Diamond Island; or, Astray in a Balloon, by Allan Arnold
147 In the Saddle from New York to San Francisco, by Allyn Draper
148 The Haunted Mill on the Marsh, by Howard Austin
149 The Young Crusader. A True Temperance Story, by Jno. B. Dowd
150 The Island of Fire; or, The Fate of a Missing Ship, by Allan Arnold
151 The Witch Hunter's Ward; or, The Hunted Orphans of Salem, by Richard R. Montgomery
152 The Castaway's Kingdom; or, A Yankee Sailor Boy's Pluck, by Capt. Thos. H. Wilson
153 Worth a Million; or, A Boy's Fight for Justice, by Allyn Draper
154 The Drunkard's Warning; or, The Fruits of the Wine Cup, by Jno. B. Dowd
155 The Black Diver; or, Dick Sherman in the Gulf, by Allan Arnold
156 The Haunted Belfry; or, the Mystery of the Old Church Tower, by Howard Austin
157 The House with Three Windows, by Richard R. Montgomery
158 Three Old Men of the Sea; or, The Boys of Grey Rock Beach, by Capt. Thos. H. Wilson
159 3,000 Years Old; or, The Lost Gold Mine of the Hatchepee Hills, by Allyn Draper
160 Lost in the Ice, by Howard Austin
161 The Yellow Diamond; or, Groping in the Dark, by Jas. C. Merritt
162 The Land of Gold; or, Yankee Jack's Adventures in Early Australia, by Richard R. Montgomery
163 On the Plains with Buffalo Bill; or, Two Years in the Wild West, by An Old Scout
164 The Cavern of Fire; or, The Thrilling Adventures of Professor Hardcastle and Jack Merton, by Allyn Draper
165 Water-Logged; or, Lost in the Sea of Grass, by Capt. Thos. H. Wilson
166 Jack Wright, the Boy Inventor; or, Exploring Central Asia in His Magnetic "Hurricane," by "Noname"
167 Lot 77; or, Sold to the Highest Bidder, by Richard R. Montgomery
168 The Boy Canoeist; or, Over 1,000 Miles in a Canoe, by Jas. C. Merritt
169 Captain Kidd, Jr.; or, The Treasure Hunters of Long Island, by Allan Arnold
170 The Red Leather Bag. A Weird Story of Land and Sea, by Howard Austin
171 "The Lone Star"; or, The Masked Riders of Texas, by Allyn Draper
172 A New York Boy out With Stanley; or, A Journey Through Africa, by Jas. C. Merritt
173 Afloat With Captain Nemo; or, The Mystery of Whirlpool Island, by Capt. Thos. H. Wilson
174 Two Boys' Trip to an Unknown Planet, by Richard R. Montgomery

---

TWO BOYS TRIP TO AN UNKNOWN PLANET. This is one of the earliest examples of Fantastic Scientific Fiction.

It originally appeared as a serial story in Frank Tousey's BOYS OF NEW YORK No. 731 to 738, starting August 17, 1889 - first complete novel in this Pluck & Luck No. 174.

Charles Bragin

Dime Novel Club Facsimile Reprint.
Charles Bragin, 1525 W. 12th St., Brooklyn, 4, N.Y.